THE HAPPY MOUNTAIN

MARISTAN CHAPMAN

STATIONERS
HALL

Della (1988)

THE HAPPY MOUNTAIN

THE HAPPY MOUNTAIN

MARISTAN CHAPMAN

GROSSET & DUNLAP
by arrangement with
VIKING PRESS

Copyright 1928 by
MARISTAN CHAPMAN

Printed in U. S. A.

Published in August 1928
Second Printing August 1928
Third Printing August 1928
Fourth Printing September 1928
Fifth Printing December 1928
Sixth Printing December 1928
Seventh Printing January 1929
Eighth Printing December 1929

To

THE ALRUNA WOMAN

CHAPTER I

It was sunset above Glen Hazard this spring day, but the town was already a bowl of purple dusk lying quiet between the shadows of the two great hills —quiet except for the winking of the last sun-gleams on the windows of the shacks that hung upon the slopes.

Lifting his burden of new-ground meal to his shoulder, Waits Lowe climbed out of the town up Cragg Hill westward, and at half the way turned, against his wont, to look back and judge of the town he was leaving.

He was a brown and healthy boy, with lightness in every muscle; with black, wild hair brushed back yet bent upon coming forward again; eyes so dark brown in the late evening light that they might have been black holes in his head; and a pert nose standing out over a stern mouth. He was darker of eye and hair than a true-born mountain boy should be, and he carried his head eagerly, with his faun's ear pointed for adventure.

While he looked down upon his own town the wrinkles at the outer eye-corners screwed up, but whether with fun, or sorrow, or plain queerness there was none to say.

"Hit may be right or wrong," he argued to him-

self, "but howsoever be it, I'm going on. The place is all swarved up with things and living, like me my ownself, and I'm bound to win free—of it and of all else."

Sunk between Cragg Hill and Red Hill, Glen Hazard had the look of being dropped in the hollow and mixed by the four winds. The General Store, the Company's Store, the Hotel, and two or three sagging warehouses made up the town, but it seemed crowded owing to the stacked lumber surrounding it on all sides and bounding its black cinder streets. The trains had but just room to get through it, and the Hardwood Lumber Mill, belching smoke and steam beyond the depot, and covering the town with grime almost equal to a city's, blocked the low valley to the north. The bridge over the creek narrowed down traffic to the Company's Store, and the four legs of the water tower took up some space. The townsmen lived in box huts hung up on the sides of the two big hills that shut in the town from the east and west; while on the south, where the railroad tracks snaked through the Gap to the outland places, the deserted trestles and dumps of a worked-out coal mine spread their black skeletons. By the time saddle-horses had been hitched in town's center, and wagon teams slung to trees up the slopes, there was no more than free walking space in Glen Hazard.

"Hit surely undoubtedly is a tight town," Waits said, "pressed down there and stuck. Been that way all my days of memory. Time I was getting out of such a tight place; time I was going on."

Yet he stood uncertain, shummicking from one foot to the other, while he drew a long breath of evening and tasted the wood smoke from the supper fires.

"Guess we'll be moving," he told the sack of meal. "You 'n' me had best be home to supper."

Directly he overtook John Bart, who had left the town long ever before him. The old man was going his way slowly because of his eighty years and the misery in his middle back. When Waits had gone on by, John called him: "Hi-yar! Waits Lowe!"

Waits stood, till the old man came up with him.

"Evening to you—evening!" the old man said, and crept on his slow way, while Waits stepped fast ahead of him.

"Going on is like dreaming," Waits told himself, as he shifted his load and trod upward, "and living is just going on. Then living and dreaming must be the same thing, and we all of us live in a dream." He stopped to look at what he had just said, and being unable to make it out, went on again more quickly to get out of its way.

Soon the little noises of people moving in the houses down in Glen Hazard were lost behind him, and he gained the top of Cragg Hill to the last clink of that day's sun. He went along upon the even road that made its way across the cut-over lands, and on past the lone shack, so far as the corner of the snake fence by the spring in Gillow's field. At a low place in the fence beyond, he stepped over and followed the short path through the laurel scrub downwards; down, down

the length of Cragg Hill and along the branch of White Oak to the foot-log and over. And as he held upon his journey the sun went down and he came at evening tide to the turn of White Oak where it hurries into Big South Fork. There he laid down his burden, and went down and washed himself, and clothed himself, and entered the house that stood over above him in the forest clearing.

The Lowes' cabin stands on northy land below Cragg Hill in the join of the two waters. The trail grows steep as the spurs fold into one another and gather down to the shoals, and the thickety patches of laurel close in so that only a single-track woods path leads to the pitiful clearing of stump land that surrounds the log house and its garden-piece. The corn patch on the slant behind the cabin grows by the grace of a few hours' morning sun that catches it through a gap in the ridge. It would be a wonder if it grew at all this year, the way the late frosts were eating at it. The people that lived in the cabin got no sun at all. They lived under the mountain, wiping at the shadows day in and day out, until they got to look all one-colored like the shadows themselves, and came to move softly across the face of the earth.

So Wait-Still-on-the-Lord Lowe came to his house, and went in to look if his mother had supper on the table.

Barsha Lowe was out back putting the bread in the oven pan. There was fried sweet potatoes and bacon sizzling on the stove, and the smell of the boiling cof-

fee would do a heart good. While she stirred beans in a black iron pot, Barsha's ears stretched to hear if her man was within the front of the house, but when she saw Waits leaning in the doorway her face puckered into a smile.

"Had I been waiting on that meal to cook supper, I'd have been waiting a long spell. Set it down, and see you don't put it where the first thing we know the old man will fall plumb over it."

She padded about the dark kitchen hole, scowling at the stained and chipped china that worried her mind and daily shamed her. More by feel than sight she got ready the table and lighted an oil lamp to stand upon one corner.

"Hit's an amazing thing the way Rashe will keep supper till after dark. Used to be he couldn't abide to eat a bite after the sun had set. It runs in my mind he's hunting down whatever's been witching the stock and making free with the chickens."

"Seen John Bart as I come on tonight," Waits said.

Barsha went on with her own words: "Rashe'll not put any faith in hants. Says all the hants he ever knew of will yell when hit and die dead when a man shoots 'em."

Waits made no matter of ghost talk.

"Heard a bluebird chirrup this morning, " he said. "Hit's got back from wherever it's been, and was setting on the fence-rail as pert as if just new made."

"Spring o' the year's here," Barsha said. "All the firstlings of the earth are about new affairs. Every

year that comes birds act like nests never been builded before." She bent to the oven and turned the bread about.

Waits went to the back door and peered at the jumping yellow light that was his father's lantern down by the barn. He turned again, and his eyes followed his mother, while he groped in his head for words. She was a tall woman and had been comely in years past, but her flesh had shrunk from her, leaving her bent with carrying her heavy frame around. Her face was full of content, as of one who has suffered and learned long ever ago that it makes no matter. It was lined and wrinkled and at peace. Her white hair was drawn smoothly into a knot at the back of her head; and she had in all her ways a quietness and strength against life's roughness.

Directly Waits said: "I got it in head to go away from this place."

He had been all winter trying to say so much as this out loud. More than that, Barsha knew what it was he'd been wanting to say and had been pressing back against it for so long a time. She knew it had to come out this spring; and already today had been different to all other days—dog bite that bluebird!

"Where at you starting to get to?"

"No place special."

"Them that sets out to get no place commonly finds themselves there." Barsha sat down to the table and listened to all that Waits, with his back to her, was telling the darkness around the doorway.

"This day the sights and sounds can't give me

enough. I'm tired of the days passing after each other without any meaning to them. I want to walk, and to go the short way over the hills, and to get to some other place, where there will be new roads under my feet and new colors to fill my eyes."

A long quiet surrounded his words.

Barsha Lowe had no willingness to give, yet her heart knew the signs, and already her head had begun to make together his bundle of spare clothes.

". . . and I'll go up over Cragg Hill, and Big Gully Hill, on past Sunview, past Robbins' Gap, and out to New Prospect, up past Whetstone, down Lost Creek so far as Lowland Acres, and on . . . and on. . . ."

Barsha was a penned-at-home woman, but she knew what spring does to a fresh heart, and would no more have tried to stop him than to tie her shawl across Big South Fork to stop a freshet.

"I'm going far 'n' beyond!" Waits went on, " . . . far 'n' beyond, and even further than that, maybe so far as down to Fentress and Cumberland."

Barsha crossed the kitchen and took the water pail off its shelf. "Here! Take this to spring for fresh water," she said, "leastways lessen you're gone right now!"

Waits grabbed the bucket from her and, unheedful of his steps, ran into the door-side and spilled the water dregs upon the clean floor.

"Heard the news?" Barsha asked.

"What?"

"Fayre Jones fell offen a foot-log watching a fence-

rail float down the creek yar morning. He's another that never could do two things at one time neither."

"Heard you tell that before," Waits gave back; and turning at the foot of the steps he called to her: "What's the best way to keep May frosts offen the crops?"

"Plant 'em in June," Barsha said. "And efn our old man should happen to find us acting simple this way, the house wouldn't be worth living in for a perfect hour."

Waits loped down to the spring to fill his bucket, and his heart was light that his mother had made no matter against his going. His voice rose, lilting from among the laurel scrub:

"Far' y' well, my mother dear,
Far' y' well to barn 'n' byre;
'N' far' y' well, my pretty girl
That kindles mother's fire.—
Far' y' well! Far' y' well!"

He climbed back to the house, and set the water bucket on its shelf. Soon thereafter Horatio Lowe came in from the barn and went to clean up, and came back to the kitchen room trying to hold down his hair. His pepper-and-salt hair was never brushed-looking; it had a habit of sticking out every-which-a-ways, soap and wet it how he might.

Rashe was a square-built man—square shoulders and square forehead, and a square-cut beard and short moustache that were no use at all to hide his good-

tempered mouth. "Cover that," he'd say, staring into his cracked glass, "cover that—as God knows I've tried—and it would surprise me how fierce I could be. It gramys me to have it go naked." Glinting back from the looking-glass, his deep-set blue eyes told him he'd have to cover them, too, ever to look like a real battler. His big nose stood a firm center to his cheerful face; and it was powerful enough to get his own way for him.

He sat at supper quietly, and through the meal uttered no word. Waits had it in mind to tell of his going forth, but could make no way against the silence.

After he had eaten, Waitstill rose up and went out from the house, and gained the top of Cragg Hill southward to look abroad as far as might be. It was full dark now, for the curtain of night had fallen, leaving but one thin slice of day on the far edge of Big Gully Hill. Directly this too had gone, and Waits turned his head toward Wild Cat Ridge, where the moon would soon start climbing. There was yellow mistiness caught in the high trees that way already. And, while he watched, the moon's round came in sight.

"The way the moon shrinks the hills is a sight to see! One hour they'll be standing dark, and reaching up into heaven, proud as they needed no salvation. Then up comes kurling the bare, white moon and they flatten out and spread and run away down valley, creeping and ashamed."

The night thickened in the hollows, while the high places were smeared with fresh moonlight. The drifting shadows made the forest a living, moving thing,

that at one time both threatened and sheltered his home-place.

The uneasiness took hold of Waits's head, and he thought upon Allardene Howard—for the girl that a man is one day going to marry will not rest forgotten upon a lown spring night. Waits was torn betwixt need of going outland, because of the tickling in his heels, and his need to be with her to watch the living part of the year take up its work. And thinking late thoughts, Waits took himself down to his home again.

CHAPTER II

THE moving light of morning passed down the slope and overbraedened the side of Cragg Hill southward of Lowes' cabin. Waits sat in the doorway upon the step and looked at the sky that was full of ragged white clouds chasing across, like ghosts of last winter's snow getting in out of the new spring daylight.

He wanted speech with his father, but it would be two suddenty-like to go out to the field and ask it. Horatio would be liable to say: "Take the hoe now, and be easing the dirt back over the planting enduring the time I run these last furrows." And Waits would forget what he had it in head to say. Furthermore he had no leaning toward a hoe this fine-pretty morning.

"Hit's a mercy you ain't struck paralyzed with setting so long," said Barsha, coming to the door to get out. " 'Pears like you don't care for a thing on earth these times save the doorstep.—Move over."

Waits shifted a few inches to let his mother pass, but he made no answer to her. Barsha went out into the garden-piece to see if anything showed up yet. She crouched over the corner bed and gently raked back the mulching of dead grass and leaves from the edging of parsley, the while she talked, mostly to herself, but now and again to Waits.

"Hit's a sight the time we lose in the front of the

year looking for a little greenness that ain't rightly due yet! A person mightily craves green-growing things against spring days come. Look a-there! if it ain't being et off as fast as it comes along! Reckon the bugs craves greens same as humans, but I surely grudge it to 'em. Tell Aunt Matt, if happen you should pass by her place, that I'll not give her a root o' parsley till come Good Friday. Should I do so, it'd not come curly. Hit'll grow—maybe hit'll grow—but 'twould be all drawn out 'n' spindling 'n' flat-leafed. Hit's not such good luck to give away parsley roots any time, but seeing it's Aunt Matt I'll chance it. You'll not neglect to tell her now!"

"What's luck and what ain't makes no matter," Waits said, while he batted at a new-born fly that was practising its wings around his head.

Barsha sat back on her heels. "Luck and unluck is all the way there is of edzacting out a heap o' things," she told him. "For all that Rashe is so stubborn, I'm waiting just till he steps offen the place to go down and hang a sprig o' wiggin in the barn to keep that hant offen the cow beasties. Hit may be too late already to keep Speckle from having the wrong kind of a calf—she's near her time. Have you had your fill of setting in one place?"

For Waits stood up to stretch and yawn, and very good his young body looked to his mother as she watched him.

"Hit's quiet," he said. "Hit's this quiet all around, and time going so slow! The school bell's not rung

eight o'clock yet, and it seems a hundred years since we ate breakfast; and I'm not hungry either."

"No person had ought to be hungry evermore after eating the sight you did at breakfast. Hit's idle you are—bone idle, 'n' slack-twisted. A person might think you come of low stock, like the Morgan tribe, or them Bracys over to Robbins' Gap. You're getting so it's too much trouble for you to be company to me around the house. You was a sight more talky before you had ever a tooth in your head."

"I'll be gone directly now," Waits said, looking doleful, "and you'll be grieving after me."

"Time I've got for grieving over a losel! Sooner you're gone, the quicker I'll have your space to keep something else in. Here comes Rashe. You hold him in talk whilst I slip to the barn with that wiggin."

The edge of a smile passed between mother and son, as Barsha turned again withindoors, and Rashe came slowly over the rail fence.

Waits stood ready to hear the harsh word his father might give him for idling, but springtime had gotten into the old man's blood, too, and he stayed upon the top fence-rail without troubling to finish coming to the house. Waits brogued over and sat down by his side.

"I had it in head to plough the high field today," Rashe said, "only the sky didn't threaten just right."

"Time goes slow," said Waits.

". . . and, thought I, where's the use of hastening the work, when late frost has yet to fall."

The day had fully come and the shadowed hollow

where the Lowes' cabin stood was as bright as need be. The hills were sharp in the clean, new air, and color was stealing back from winter. Most of the trees were yet a blue mist, but greenness showing here and there gave out the secret; and red buds lighted up the near slopes.

"Seems like days without end," Waits said.

"And, with one thing and another, I took it in head to lay off a spell and just take time."

Contented, they sat silent while the day grew.

As early as last year Waits had told himself he would go; but the year was late, and October had well-nigh gone, and the bright pines stood colorful in the naked woods; and in November the snow came, asking a man to stay wrapped around with the things he knew, and to come in by the big wood fire. And, being in for the winter, there was his father and mother, who were more to a man than ever he need let them know. He was glad he'd made no harsh promise, but had set the time for the coming of spring, when all things begin to live again.

"Time makes no matter," he said.

Rashe thought about this.

"Well, you're wrong there—or else right," he said. "Oftentimes it just goes, and makes no matter where; other times—look at what it'll do! Hit'll grow fruit trees up to bearing while a man thinks; hit'll turn a man's hair white, and wear corns on his feet. Time goes slow, and then one day you come to take count and a mort o' things has took place—the little tads grown to men; and girl childrens grown and married

and having childrens themself; and the old folks being dead ten years a'ready! Leave time alone and it'll work."

They sat on the fence and watched time pass by.

"I aim to leave these parts," Waits said, out of nothing.

"I seen that a'ready," Horatio told him. "Been seeing it all winter. My eyes is most as good as my ears for their age; and my eyes further tells me you'll be back as fast as ever you can kurl."

"I'm liable not to come back. I don't aim ever to come back—saving maybe to visit a spell. I aim to live outland, where there's goings-on."

"Scandalous talk," his father said. "Scandalous talk." He looked the boy over and found him healthy and limber. He lacked the extra height both Rashe and Barsha owned; but he was well shaped, and his head truly set, spite of his holding it a little on one side as if he was all the time listening and searching with his pointed right-hand ear.

Directly Rashe said: "You're just like that time when you was a tinsey tad, and swallowed a cartridge out of your grandsir's sheriff gun, and I was scared to whip you case 'n it might go off and in a manner waste you. I feel right now like you'd swallowed more than your insides could make away with; yet it's not in reason it would be anything poison-like, since you're so prancy and strong. Hit's too much studying on things is eating into your head. First you know you'll be fritter-minded as a outlander."

"I aim to see the world 'n' what's in it."

Rashe looked upon his son's face and was pleased. The boy had his mother's straight mouth, a chin strong like a trap, and the same cleft between his large dark eyes that Barsha had, only not yet so deep. The nose was straight, with just the least idea of turning up, but the notion had gone on and left it as it was. But the thing that most contented Rashe was the look on Waits's face, made up out of wonder and a great stubbornness that yet had a smile hiding back of it, liable to break out any minute.

"Who-all's going to stop the world spinning and hold it still, while you walk around it like you'd boughten a show to yourself?" he asked.

"Efn I could make the world 'n' all in it stand still for the half of a second, I'd edzact it all out, and all would come clear. It's the going on of things that gets a man all gramyed. The world's full of wonders, the preacher says, and I aim to view some of 'em."

The shadows had moved a half hour ere Rashe said: "You've no need to look afar for wonders. There's turned-over stones, and moss-prints, and broken acorn caps where none has passed to touch 'em; and there's trodden grass blades around a empty house; and when a man asks 'How come all this?' none answers."

"My soul's ailing me. Hit's writhing this way 'n' that, 'n' weaving in the wind, 'n' blossoming in the sunlight, 'n' taking its food straight out of the days as they go by—some days sweet, some days bitter, 'n' some just a mite salt; but my soul ain't had a good

side-meat-'n'-corn-pone day in so long it's about to starve to death."

"You reckon you'd find more to content you efn you should journey far 'n' beyond?"

"Maybe yes; maybe no. How can I tell that's never tried it—me, that for all I've ever seen might think Clear Fork Hill the steepest mountain on earth?"

Rashe got down off the fence as though going on withindoors, and then got back up, as serious as if he'd just that minute got there.

"Then you aim to let go home and to journey forth?"

"That's the way my head is set."

"Got some saved wages laid by for the journey?"

"I'd despise to be so forehanded. Hit'd be plain pointing scorn at the Lord, who's give me a strong body to win what I need to keep life within."

"You'll not go with my willingness or consent."

"Then sorrowfully I must go without having it."

Rashe looked long at Waits, who was kicking his heels against the fence as if he had wildfire in his shoes.

Waits said: "What I most need to get shut of is my own feet's never-ending treading the same ground. I need to get free of being pushed along the world; and I crave the hope of something different to hold onto!"

"What you have need of, young-un, is Experience. When you've had time to take your share of that, you'll not talk such high palamity this way. Experience is

what learns a man to stay home 'n' mind his own affairs."

Waits flung a limber leg over the fence and sat astride the top rail, his arms hung dangling, and his lithe body rocking gently, while he dreamed out: "Efn that's all Experience is, it's no more than just living. Hit might maybe keep a man from wondering over things, but I need to wonder. We walk down the road in the dust 'n' don't have time to see a thing but the toes of our shoes as we go. Me, I'm bound to walk on edges and to look down offen high places. A shadow come over my mind, and I've been making out to walk from under it since long ever ago."

Rashe broke sharply into his chant with a hard question: "Supposing you was to go out in the world—how'd you make out to balance yourself?"

Waits jumped the question like a colt at a gate in springtime. "What I got to do with the world, or it with me? All the traffic I have is with my ownself, wheresoever I am placed."

"Then wherefore not stay where the Lord started you, and make an end of it?"

"There's something wanting in the spring of this year," Waits answered him. "Hit's wistful 'n' beckoning. Every place you stop, the next one calls 'Come over here!' You've scarcely time to notice the birds a-nesting. What's lacking in this spring? Even the river is uneasy and keeps moiling 'n' curling, where it ought by proper rights to be lying smooth, waiting for a man to go fishing. This year's spring is restless as a squirrel. When you face it outdoors it sets you tingling;

and when you try to get indoors from it, it pulls you back out."

The clouds had cleared from the sky, and it was such a day as if somebody had left the door of Heaven open wide. And Rashe perfectly forgot what he was going to say next for his son's guiding.

Waits chanted: "Spring days when they come to our land up here in the mountains bring a terrible joy! All winter long we set indoors 'n' pine for 'em; and when they come we get as light 'n' free as if let out of prison. Wandering thoughts come to a man about what lies beyond the mountains."

Rashe paid no heed. He had come to look back on his own springtime. He had forgotten Waits, who in his turn forgetting, stood with his keen eyes misted, looking upon some dream that carried on its play nowhere.

Rashe sang out: "Used to be, when I was a young-un, I said, 'I will be wise'; but it was far from me and very deep, who can find it out! I turned about, and my heart was set to know 'n' to find out, and to seek the reason of things." His voice suddenly fell low and he said: "But that was long ever ago."

When Waits had looked beyond the cleared land of home, where the close trees bound the edge of the woods down towards White Oak branch, he stood upon the last bar of the fence and breathed in a full breath of the morning air, and he cried out:

"I feel like I had enough Chaos in me for the Lord to create another world out of!"

"Times, I recall," Rashe told himself, not aware of

Waits balancing above him, "when come sun I'd want to jump 'n' dance; come cloud over 'n' I'd need to set 'n' weep; and then a wind from the far corners of the earth would stir me so my blood tickled 'n' I'd feel bound to start out that day to do a great deed."

Waits was no more listening than if he'd been a catbird.

"That's what 'tis—a piece of old Chaos got left over in me!"

While Rashe went on: ". . . but soon's the wind got turned around the least bit, I'd make me ready to lay me down 'n' sleep right now. What can a man do when all life just plays him like a fiddle? Come night, and I'd be setting along a fence-top—me 'n' the moon perfectly making faces at each other."

Waits fell off the fence backwards into a gant blackberry bush that grew against, and while he unhooked himself here and there, he kept on: "Chaos is what it is—and the likeliest thing for the Lord to start making out of it would be a rain-crow a-setting in a chock-cherry tree—I wonder me why!—Here, pull this loose where it tangles me 'n' I can't get hold."

But Rashe kept on living back forty years, when spring tasted keen and he had no son whatsoever to cherish and content, let alone one hollering out of a blackberry briar.

"There was flower plants a sight in the world! Times past, joy-o'-the-mountain would grow so thick you'd scarce have to stir a leaf to find it; and I'd be straddling the top of this same fence at this same and very place. And I'd be all surrounded with eyebright,

'n' devil's-paint-brush, 'n' dog-tooth violets. And the smell of sweet grass was a fair sight to a man's nose."

"Time's coming," Waits cried, "when the sun's going to come out, 'n' stay out!"

And Rashe now answered him: "Time when sap starts a-climbing, 'n' squir'ls start nibbling the hickory buds!"

"Time when trees get all thin-greenery looking!"

"Time," Rashe finished, "when a man ought to work but he'd liefer not!"

Barsha's voice broke out to call for wood and water, and both of them looked ashamed, each finding the other's mind naked before him. It was forever too late for Rashe to feign unwillingness to the boy's going forth, when his own soul had been seen straining at its bonds; it was forever too late for Waitstill to pretend fear of his father's wrath, when Rashe had caught him fearful of nothing that was or could be. Rashe said: "Reckon your Ma's needing wood for the dinner fire. Fetch her some in, whilst I step down t' spring after water."

CHAPTER III

"Onct I had a muley cow,
Muley sence she's born—
Hit took a buzzard a thousand years
To fly from horn to horn—

So . . . so . . . so . . . oo . . . ooooo!

I'll fry my meat in a frying pan,
And boil my beef in a pot,
And shear my sheep with my ol' case knife,
And sell all the wool I got!"

Soon Waits had to leave singing to spare some breath for the climb over Big Gully Hill. He had started to get to Howards' Place early that morning to have the day long with Dena before he should bid her farewell. And now he came to the top of Big Gully where the cemetery was, and rested there to recall his breath. He looked upon the pent roofs of tar-paper that shielded the graves' earth from washing down-slope in the rains.

"There's this to think about," he told himself: "every time a day passes a person's got less days than he used to have this side of the grave."

And now the woods were all heaped and dim around him, and he felt himself afloat in the stillness of early day.

Then came Fayre Jones taking long, easy steps toward his work at the big mill. Fayre was tall and thin out of all reason, so he liked to rest his bones by carrying them softly. He had the look of being about to lie down should he stop moving forward. But Fayre liked a mess of talk better than going to sleep, so he stood swaying above Waits, while he put at him about his going forth.

Waits answered him: "Who gave out to you I was going any place, Long Ears?"

"Nobody needed to. First, you never hunted you ary job o' work soon's Sam Ewart's mill burned; and then you been acting wilder than common. Furthermore there's been such a great going forth of persons from out Glen Hazard I thought you might have caught the disease; and now I see you with my own eyes going sweethearting up to Dena's at seven o'clock, or such a matter, of a work-day morning."

Fayre's pale blue eyes had been resting along the crest of the far hills, and now he brought his head around slowly till he looked at Waits.

"You speak live words," Waits granted, "and efn you're content, I'll not add to them." He moved from the fence, but Fayre stood before him to hinder his going.

"Time you get back from following the walkable ways," Fayre threatened, "me 'n' Bess will have been married a great while, an'll have us a home-place all swarved up with childrens. And you'll be back to find Dena gone kurling off with some other fellow what knew enough to stay home."

"It's calm not to be married," Waits made answer in good temper—for he could see ahead where Fayre Jones was going to have an uneasy time with Dena's little sister, Bess Howard.

Fayre's eyes opened wide and anxious. "A heap o' folks all time doing it," he said.

"And everybody that's ever tried it complains a sight in the world."

Fayre pleaded: "Being married ain't so terrible dangerous."

"Hit's unknowen all that goes with it," Waits warned him. "Me, I'm going foot-loose a spell first—free to come 'n' go unbound. Believe I'll be getting on."

Fayre was stuck in a maze of misery and no longer able to move forward or back, so Waits walked around him, and went on his way lilting:

> "When a man's married he ain't his own man,
> And has to get along just as well as he can;
> He can't go a-roving or live his own life,
> 'Cause he's sold him his freedom to buy him a wife!"

Singing about being married made him think about Dena, and the wistful-pretty look she had. "She's made so she's neat as a nut," he told a thrasher he was watching nest. "All her goodness is shut up quiet-like inside her; but you just know the kernel's sweet and sound all through."

And now he came into the clearing upon the edge of the road that ran past Howards' Place.

The Howards' farmstead was fere and fellowly

with the countryside. The log cabin, chinked with clay mud, was set in the midst of the farmlands, and around it flocked the barn, woodshed, and well-house, all looking as if they grew there and had not been built with hands. The orchard gathered close about the house, and the tillable fields surrounded them all, while upon the far edge of the hinder side grew the wood-lot of third-growth timber. The farm-place was in an opening, for only Big Wolf Bald stood over it, and that not so as to crowd. All the fields were nearabout flat, and the planting and gathering of crops was made woman-easy, so that the crippled old man and the two girls made out to have as rich and pretty a homestead as any.

Dena was watching for Waits, but, not to be unseemly, she had gone about the well-house and made as if spreading linen to bleach. When he stood at the gate and hailed the house, she went on with her work, unheeding; but after she had heard her father's voice answer from withindoors, she came front and bade Waits enter. The morning sun showed sudden gold in her brown hair; and the light in her brown-hazel eyes was mocking and full of fun, but her mouth was firm and solemn, and a little anxious at the corners.

"How come you're not at town hunting some work?" she asked, while she walked before him to the porch. Waits made no answer, for he was watching her figure, that was soft, and fairly made, and light. She was built on small bones, as her wrists and ankles told. She stood upon the top step of the porch, while he looked up to her. Other days she had only to stand thus to

take his soul prisoner, but this morning he was skittish as a yearling colt and no hand could gentle him.

Now she went withindoors to 'ware her father and Bess who it was come visiting; and directly Bess's voice came from out the house: "Which means I got to do the main work today and keep myself absent besides!" When Dena came back out they walked together along the pathway and stood a while in content beneath the grandsir tree, needing no words.

Whenever he saw her anew it seemed to Waits that the difference betwixt Dena and other girls was that Dena had mystery around the corners of her mouth. "Hit gives a person the kind of feeling he gets looking toward the next bend in an unknowen road and wondering what's around it," he thought. "And Dena never talked just to be saying words. She'd speak with the way she moved—'specially her hands. Efn she was mad it could be told from the way she held herself up; and when she was dowie her hands would fair cry as she folded them. And then her mouth again—a man might think she was going to smile, and all the time her mouth was only curling up at the corners because she was feeling wise about unknowen what!"

Directly they got to the fence-line and they turned and circled the garden-piece and came to the barn, where, in the yard about, were chickens, and a sow with her pigs.

"They come too soon and I lost some," Dena said. "But the most of 'em is getting on now."

"You can fetch on any kind of beast. You got the touch to do it."

"I like doing that; and they feel I like 'em. Efn you don't like 'em they'll sicken and die on you without any explaining whatever. I'm going to raise me more next year—I'm going to raise me more hogs than crops. They don't bring more, but they don't need no hoeing."

She went on: "You'd best come in 'n' spend the day."

"No, I reckon I'll be getting back."

"Efn borrow fire's all you come for, go 'long."

"I aim to start out, come tomorrow morning's light."

Dena well knew this, and the dread of it had been on her all the winter months; but lightly she said: "Where-all to?"

"Far 'n' beyond, to see the far places of the world. From here it looks like all the world might be made out of hills 'n' sky. But there's valleys so big a person can't see across them; and there's towns so big a man's liable to be lost in them; and there's the sea—the sea over yonder!"

The hills were dusky purple, and here and there were marred with fire-scalds, where the forest had been burned clear, leaving great tawny gashes like wounds along their flanks. The purple faded to blue in ever gentler shades, until the hills went into a far place man never traveled.

"Over yonder's the ocean-sea," Waits said again.

"You aim to keep me standing out here the day long, owing to you not having time to come withindoors?" Dena asked him.

"Way out is where I aim to go. My mind'll break

upon these hills. They shut me around. I will go outland ere they become my grave-place. My shoes are swift for roaming."

"Seems to me efn you make much of your home-place it holds all your fancy needs," Dena told him, while they moved along. "Come on in the house while I start to fix dinner. Pretty soon the old man'll be hollering."

Waits said: "Big wide valleys—and past them the ocean-sea. My head is set and my feet will carry me away."

Homer Howard, crippled since years ago from falling off a roof he was building, sat hunched in a chair by the fire, and held around him a bed quilt, so that he would be warm. He had a well-featured face, much like Dena; and he made quick, bird-like turns of his head, seeing and hearing everything in his narrow world to make up for not getting into wider places. The things Homer would notice for one pent up would surprise a person. Saving when he clashed with his neighbor, Luther Bart, Homer was gentle mannered and right minded.

He greeted Waits gaily: "What for you spudding 'round this time of the day 'n' week?"

After Waits told him of his faring forth, Homer clicked back and forward in his chair—for the home-made rockers were not carved just even. Homer never rocked save to help himself think. He said it kept his mind at home to hear the noise.

"There's a lot of scenery right 'round these parts," Homer said. "There's a couple of mountains in the

way, but if they was wiped out you could see the scenery clear so far as county seat."

"Ain't just scenery I'm seeking," Waits told him. But he could not go on, for he never could give away speech to one unfellowly. Pretty soon Homer would begin to tell stories and Waits could set and let his mind go free its own way while he harkened. So in his head he had gone far outland, and nearabout won so far as the ocean-sea, while Homer told about hunts he'd been on, for the old cripple loved best to talk of the days he was able to run the high hills.

Before he was 'ware of it, Homer was finishing his story and Waits had not yet gathered the sense of it.

"Did you so?" he said with manners; and Homer chuckled, and rocked in his chair.

"Yes, sir! We got that bear home three days thereafter by means of tying his legs around a ash pole. But it was different the time me 'n' Washburn Tyler 'n' Sam Ewart 'n' Harm Jones went fishing. It was agreed the first one getting a fish was to stand drinks all 'round to the crowd. Hit's well knowen they three is the meanest men in this part the country—tight as the bark of a tree ere sap-rising, that's them. First off they fought for the chanciest places, and after more time than enough got 'em set. Well, sir, I'm telling you, and may my tongue cleave to my teeth efn 'taint so, them dad-burned blisters was too mean to pull up the bites they got!"

"And I reckon you had to stand the cost of the treat?" Waits put in, trying hard to hold his mind to this job of talk.

"No, sir; no, sir," Homer said, solemn and well-content. "You see, it was this way—I never put ary bait onto my hook 'n' line."

After dinner the young ones sat on the porch, Dena in a stiff chair, sewing on quilt pieces, or picking at it more likely; Waits upon the steps, leaning against a porch post and looking away into far distances, sometimes beating a dance tune with one eager foot, and now turning to look up at Dena. And they spoke slowly, with long quiet places between, for that they were well content together. Yet their minds were not at one. Dena was hurt at Waits's going, and to hide it she played with him, teasing and laughing, or maybe with some hard, everyday word smashing his word-picture dreams into splintered sunbeams.

Yet their hearts being but one they clung all the closer; and high noon departed, and the mid-afternoon slid away into the chill spring evening.

"We'll get us married some of these days, Dena," he said.

"Some of these days! And you going kurling off to none knows where. Happen you'll find your ocean-sea and get drownded in it. I guess maybe it's big enough. Times I think you hate me, Waits Lowe; and then you talk of loving 'n' wedding."

"Hit's just the natural time for loving when the dogwood's out," he answered. "And I seen a bird's-foot violet already today sheltering on a tree root. But there's the thorn tree, too. Hit gets a thin cover of green on—and then—then, you see, Dena, there's love

'n' hate all mixed up together there. A man can't tell . . ."

Dena drew her hand back from resting on his shoulder. She leaned back in her chair, her eyes looking afar off to an old rising in the mountains where the faulting had slipped when time was young.

"If we was Bess 'n' Fayre now," Waits sat up straight to argue.

Dena finished such talk ere it started: "Which not being that simple we won't ever have so smooth a time, and it's no gain struggling, so that's enough."

An hour passed, and no more words were spoken.

"And how long you aim to be gone from here, Say-Nothing?"

"Hit's unknowen how long."

"Hit's unknowen what's come to you all-in-all."

"But, Dena, you can't handily blame a man when things get all mazed in his head."

"Hit's not blame I'm thinking. I'm thinking how your going is like to the southwest wind. When it blows from yon ways 'taint fitten for man or beast. It plain starves the corn, 'n' it scares the stock, 'n' it strikes growing things all wede 'n' witherdy; it blows away a person's contentment. Yes, sir, it blows happiness over the next hill. What are you made out of to be so unliken to common homemade boys?"

They watched time go by, while Waits shifted to lean on Dena's knee.

"I reckon the same Lord that made the elm tree and the farkleberry bush had a hand in me. Times I

think that must be so, because I feel sib with 'em. And then I think, No, sir! I must just have fetched up anyways and never been shaped by ary God whatsoever."

Dena stuck her needle gently into him and he moved back against the post.

"Well, old Elm Tree, you'd as well keep nigh where your roots are; and I never took notice that a farkleberry's much given to running around loose. The God that made you was the One that made rabbits 'n' chipmunks—brown things out o' the woods that flitter away while you look at 'em."

"You play with what I say, 'n' you play with what I mean to say and yet can't put words to, till I'm nearabout distract. Why, efn I was to take your heart today, it wouldn't weigh over a ounce!"

"Some way it don't feel light. This is the last of our days, Waits Lowe."

"I'll be coming to fetch you out, soon's I've fixed a place to keep you."

"Who's saying I'm wanting to be fetched from the place I was made and grew in? Let alone that no fixed place will ever abide around where you are. Times I feel like if you stayed in one place over a day-'n'-night it would fall open from around you, you're that restless."

"Times I feel that way in my ownself. But after many days I'll content my mind 'n' body to rest in one place—more'n likely that'll come to pass."

"You talk about many days!" Dena said. "Why, the days fly over—fly over and are gone like redbirds moving south." She looked up as if she might see days like

birds going by in the eveglôm. "One day 'n' the next, 'n' the day after that; and where are we going, and why do we live? But no matter how fast we move, the days yet fly over faster. Every time a day goes I feel like I could cry out with the pain, wanting to tell the sun to stop. Only way to have a lot of every day is to keep right still in one place 'n' move slow, till you can almost feel the earth turning around. Seems the same thing that makes me want to stay still, drives you to run wild."

Waits held this in his mind, unanswering.

"Hit's not all in the days' going on," he said directly. "Hit's something inside me craves to break loose. Hit's the need of words."

" 'Pears like to me you got a-plenty."

"Plenty for every-day talk," Waits agreed. "What I crave is the kind o' words that fits in with the world. I guess maybe it's being so crazed over the lilting, smooth sounds of life. When I can dance 'n' sing I feel good, because I'm all part of the dancing 'n' singing; and when I come out of it, I think 'Now efn I had words like that I'd be all of a piece instead of all torn up.' Words ought properly to be lilting sounds, which those I got ain't."

"Some words are like that," Dena said. "Heap o' words in the Bible: 'Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul . . .' and there's more in other places, but it takes book-learning to come by them. And, of course, you got to have the books."

"Where at are they?"

"There's a power of books somewheres in the world," Dena told him.

"I'm going to get me some," Waits said, folding himself up off the doorstep, ready to go.

"You act like you could lay hands on them ere the sun goes down," Dena sulked. "A person might think you couldn't open your mouth again till you'd looked the words outen books. What's gone with the books you got in the room over at your house?"

"There's not but three, and all of 'em old, black-old 'n' wrinkledy; and I've read through 'n' through 'em. Hit's out o' the least thin one I got the craving for the ocean-sea. Wine-dark sea, it says it is. I don't know. I guess all the words I was born with got lost in my mind somewheres." So Waits answered, and sat him down again, carefully, as if he was something precious.

"Being they three done harm enough, teaching you to run outland, best leave the rest of the world's books be."

Waits left this where it was. "Seems there's a power o' words in me—hard words, made outen iron 'n' brass; and soft words, like corn-silk; and proud, sharp words, like frost on a sapling branch; and pretty, kind words, like blue flowers coming out o' the black swamp dirt."

"Let such words go and it might maybe ease the feeling that drives you to roam 'n' wander," Dena said, a mite hopeful.

"I'm afeared o' them. Stillness is only air 'n' quiet emptiness, and efn I was to let go the wrong words in it, it would be liable to spoil."

"Turn loose some, 'n' let's chance making the air

a mite blinky," Dena said, while she picked up a scrap bit and laid it evenly against her piecing.

"Hit's no manner of use with stiff words," Waits made moan. "If I had me a fiddle now, and could play it, I'd turn the houms into a flowery field by just pulling my bow; I'd pile up the mountains 'n' melt 'em away again with the swaying of a tune; and—there's you," he said, looking surprised at her. "Almost you make me find words for you, with your soft-like hair 'n' your eyes a man could drown in and never miss himself. Why, I recall that the nearest earth ever come to standing still was the day that love of you perfectly took hold of me! The earth looked like it would never wither. It was all magical, like a dream in the night, and the stars, come eveglôm, were like wild poplar leaves sparkling."

Dena held her quilt piece this way and that. "A person can't any longer see to stitch," she said. And after she had folded up her sewing, she went on: "And being all that is so, you go kurling off searching for life; and I stay right here 'n' get on as best I may with the farm."

Waits was forlorn. "Men's made to leave their womenfolk, Dena. But they's forever coming back to 'em."

"More leaving than returning likely." Dena put by her work and came to stand over above him, while she said: "I'll make out, I guess. You go wandering the way men always did since long ever ago. Men always has got what women's been denied; but that don't keep them from knowing the craving. Likely it's too

strong for just a man, where a woman can crush it down. Go on—go on away. And when you get so's you're all worked out, come back, and expect to find me doing that week's wash and thankful to see you!"

Waits got to his feet and stood beside her. He tried to forgive himself, as men do when bent on walking their way over the sufferings of womenkind. "The craving to find out and to go in search of life is stronger than a man's good sense, Dena."

"Never was a man had good sense enough to give up his own way to pleasure his womenfolk."

"Yes there has been," he said.

"Show me them."

But he could think of none.

Dena turned from him, and stood leaning against the porch post, while the night wind came up and swept around her, and she was brushed clean of desire like the trees of gold leaves in the fall.

"I'm bound to go, Dena."

"Get you gone, then." Her voice was proud.

"Gin you lift a hand for me to stay, I'll give over the notion."

"Get you gone."

He saw her strength and the hurt in her eyes, and he could no more help it than he could put back the leaves on the hickory when it was blown clear. Soon there would be snow, and an iron-hard freeze—but after it there would come another spring like this one.

And so he left her.

CHAPTER IV

EARLY upon his leaving morning Waits rose up before day, and by the light of a stub end of candle made shift to find him some breakfast. He heated up coffee in the old blue enamel pot, fried a piece of side-meat and some eggs and ate a power of cold bread left from last night's supper, spreading apple butter between.

The cook-stove, the chairs, the big kitchen pans and pails cast queer shadows on the blackened log walls. The candle beam caught and held a picture pinned against a double sheet of newspaper. Waits's eyes clung to the picture, which showed a guardian angel watching that two children did not fall over a steep while they picked wildflowers. Waits could just recall being told about the picture, when he and his sister were tinsey tads; and very next day sister had fallen off Big Bar'n Steep. His father had torn down the picture—Waits could see by the candle light the join where Barsha had glued it up again. Rashe had said: "That's all the good your angel's done our little girl." He was plumb bereft over little Martha. Barsha had said: "How we know she ain't better watched over than Waits here that's got him a life to live yet?" So she had put the picture back. Looking at it by the darkness of his lone candle made Waits

feel strange in his head. "I wonder me," he said, "am I watched over yet?"

Now he went in the front room where his folk lay asleep, and there he picked up the bundle of clean shirt and socks Barsha had made ready for him. From the top of the bundle there rolled off a screw of newspaper and in it was money put by for him by Rashe. He laid down the clothes and started to put the money away in his pocket; instead he wrapped it again in the paper and laid it back on the chimney shelf. He'd never planned to make his going costly to them. Besides he recalled that the bit he had left of his last pay from Sam Ewart's might maybe do him two-three days. He bethought him to wipe his shoes clean for a lucky start; and he turned the big collar of his shirt back over his rough coat and set his hat gaily upon his new-brushed hair, and was pert as need be for a homemade boy.

He stepped without the door, and pulled it to—soft-like, not to waken those within. The house lay helpless, yet bare of the bushes and flower things that would come to comfort it through the summer. And no sooner had he set foot so far as the gate than he was taken with the simple-headed notion not to go. Soon he got over that foolishness and set himself to the business of the road.

Back in the room, Rashe and Barsha lay still as logs, as they had lain this hour past, so Waits would think them sleeping. With the closing of the door, Rashe let go a long breath, and reared him up in bed, rubbing his wild hair forward and back and blink-

ing at the empty fire-hearth, and the wall where, over the fire-board, was hung his shotgun and two hunting-knives beside. The scattered ash and half-burned dead faggot on the hearth were sib to his thoughts. In the corner, hardly to be seen for darkness, was a shelf bearing a flower-painted cup without a handle, and a block of rough ore Waits one day brought in as a tinsey child, because he believed the sparkles were gold in it. He had never let it be thrown out, even when he had learned better. He was the believingest child. Betwixt the chunk of slag and the cup were held up three books, brought from the far land across, by Rashe's grandsir; and over above the shelf was the bow of a lost fiddle. Waits had used the books in the long winter days. It was a surprise he didn't carry them off; and he never failed of lamenting the fiddle. Rashe thought: "Maybe now, if we'd contrived to get him a fiddle to content him at home . . ." Rashe climbed him out of bed and put his late and useless thought aside, and dragged open the door and peered out into the morning, to see if perhaps maybe. . . . But the world was empty.

"He's gone," Rashe said.

Barsha crept her out of the yon side of the box bed and felt around for her shoes. Directly when she got her clothes on, she dragged herself to the kitchen hole and started an unwilling breakfast fire.

It was still half dark when Waits started up from his home place, and the stars were yet running from the rising sun. Over there was the Blue Star of Spring,

she that first comes of a February night when everything is winter-bound, and long before the trees and birds tell a person anything about spring being just around the corner. When the Blue Star comes in sight, violets will be along directly.

And as he went on, he thought how strange it is that all nature is tied together. When the first bluebird sings, the blood-roots burst in flower and the maples start to leaf out and the Round Bright Star comes up gaily in the east. He comes along soon of a night early in March, when the honey-locust trees are budding, and he stays all April to see the dogwood before he gets fadey with summer nights.

And now the day brightened, and Waits trod over the slopes, up and down, and the soft soil under his feet heartened him, and the brightness of the air got into his blood, and he was glad. He was glad Sam Ewart's mill had burned and his work with it—glad that the sun shone pale gold aslant the trees, and glad of the sound of the water splashing far down White Oak. And because he was glad of these things, he forgave himself, knowing that once in his life a man must go free. So he plucked him a thorn to pin up the front of his brown hat, and whistled him a tune, and trafficked along, trumlic and gay.

"The morning gleams," Waits sang. "Hit shines clear upon my going forth and promises a joyful day! Air smells of spring, and never was a day a man could see so far over yonder hills!"

Along just here, Waits tripped himself over a dewberry vine, and being he was at a high place near to

Bone Cave Rock, he agreed with himself to rest a spell. So he stayed quiet, to hear the sounds the forest makes at daybreak.

Spring o' the year! And lying upon the rock overtopping his home valley Waits knew a passion of longing that came near breaking his will to go. There could not be any better place in all the whole world than his home place, safe nested in the folding hills, where his grandsir's grandsir had placed it aforetime, carving a space out of the forest when it was close-set and wild. The very place himself might have picked out, Waits thought. Should he long stay looking upon it he would be drawn back again, so he got upon his feet, his gladness of the last hour made sterner, as he led himself down from Bone Cave Rock upon the side thitherward from his home-place.

Waits had not gone more than a piece down the path before he was overtaken by the oozing figure of Fayre Jones, who came up silently behind him. They went on for a mile or more without words. When they came upon the road where the path takes off round Red Hill toward McCarthy's Place, Fayre said: "Thought I'd go a piece with you."

"I take it kindly," Waits answered him.

Soon they came to Ewart's Place, where the mill had burned the foregoing week, and Waits said: "I'm bound to step in here and 'ware Aunt Matt about the parsley like I was told."

He walked across the yard to where Sam Ewart was sitting on a chopping-log thinking about getting firewood cut up; and if ever the Lord made a man

specially to sit on a log, he made Sam Ewart. While Waits went in, Fayre drooped himself over the fence as if he had fallen heir to all the spare time on earth.

"Want you to come on back to work, Waits," Sam Ewart hailed, his high-up voice squeaking like a mill whistle. "I aim to build me a new mill soon's I get me moved, and you can come on. We'll make us a heap o' cash money, the way I got the new rig figured."

"I take it kindly, Sam," Waits told him, "but I'll hold off work for a spell. I'm going out 'n' beyond. Where-all's Aunt Matt?"

Sam split the air again with his shrill words: "Back house, I reckon.——Hey! Matt! Waitstill Lowe's happened in with some words to say to you!—Well, likely efn you're too far gone out of the way I can get some other fellow cheaper. I know a man over to the Gap, Bracy his name is, kin to the Morgans. He's maybe decayed, like all them low stock, but he'll likely come for less wages."

Waits left him and turned back across the yard to meet Aunt Matt coming from the house. Aunt Matt was a small, quick-moving woman, with a bright blue eye for the fun of life, and a big mouth set to endure whatever might be sent. She was little and neat and brown-dressed like a bird, though crumpled from being wife to Sam Ewart a score of years.

"How you, Waits? How you, Fayre?" she called to the boys. "Come on in and rest you a spell."

"No'm—guess we'll be getting on," Waits told her.

"You fetched down my parsley roots?"

"No, ma'am, but come to tell you whyfor not. She says ain't such good luck to give away parsley roots no time, but seeing it's you she'll take the risk, come Good Friday, that being the only day fitten to dig it. Other day dig it, and it might maybe grow, but it'll come flat-leafed 'n' spindling."

Aunt Matt started nipping across the yard to where the boys stood, talking all the time she came. "Well, seem's like she'd send 'em when said would. 'Taint like Barsha to say and then not to do. Still 'n' all, I guess I'm best off without 'em, seeing we're moving again." She looked woeful worn as she said it.

Waits gave kindly words: "Sam'll wear you out, dragging you forward and back over the locality. Seems he'd let be awhile since mill burned."

Aunt Matt cheered herself a little and said: "Does seem every next move'll be the end o' me; but hit's a sight how tough a wife-woman gets to be. Hit's all owing," she let her voice down so as not to bother Sam sitting on the chopping-block. "Hit's all owing to him having took a fresh spasm of riches in his mind."

Seeing her need of talk, Waits recalled his manners and stayed on, and sat him upon the fence next to Fayre, with his feet hooked up on the third bar. Aunt Matt leaned on the gate-post and took up her lament, yet perking her head on one side, for her heart was proud of Sam Ewart's rich notions, even when she was put hard against it to get a smidgen of meal for bread.

"Sam never stays no place longer than Pat stayed

in the army. He's up and gone soon as he can trade house and all in it for a two-mule wagon and beasts. He's the up-and-gonest man ever I did see. Hit's just his way o' living."

" 'Taint like it was crowded hereabouts," Fayre put in; "—can't see so much as ary other's neighbor smoke."

"Surely it ain't the crowding—hit's plain contrariness; and me spending all my life packing things together and getting 'em broke when all's done. How's a body to keep a home-place when it's evermore being peeled offen her? Every time he finds him a new hole to make a home-place of, it's all to go through again —work 'n' care 'n' lonesomeness 'n' studying how we're going to keep from starving whilst we get rich. 'Twould have saved a power of trouble efn the Lord had made a contented man out o' Sam to start with, and stuck him down where he was meant to stop."

Aunt Matt looked up at the bend of the open road on the far hillside, and she said: "It would have been a hard piece of work for the Lord Himself, but, being He's almighty I don't see why He couldn't, or anyways taken a shape at it."

The boys shook their heads over the Lord's neglectfulness.

"What does all this moving come to?" Aunt Matt asked. "Hit surprises me Sam don't take a habit to plant his corn and taters out on six different acres of land a mile apart, so as he could pleasure himself chasing from one to the other enduring hoeing time."

"Maybe he figures each time'll take you to a better

place," Waits said, shifting to a softer part of the fence, when he saw Aunt Matt yet full of words.

"Times I'd sooner be in a worse place and *stay* in it," she said. "Here comes Sam now. You hear him."

Sam was a heavy-built man without much lift for his size. He was too heavy for his short legs, which had bent in the task of carrying him around the last fifty or more years. He had a red face and white hair and moustache, and Aunt Matt kept him clean as a baby in his white shirt and blue overall clothes.

"We're talking about you 'n' moving," Aunt Matt warned him when he had rolled near enough.

"I heard you," he said. "What about it?"

He scared Aunt Matt when he talked roughly, but she was best pleased when scared, because she thought that if Sam was bad enough to scare her he must be a big man and all would fall his way. Trouble was, nobody else had yet taken fright.

"I been telling the boys, efn you was in the best place on earth, you'd move out."

"Course 'n' I would," Sam said, "for how'd I know I was in the best place till I'd tried others? And where'd be the use of being in the best place efn you didn't know it?"

"And where'd be the harm of not knowing it, efn there was nought else to know—where's the sense in it, I say."

"Who said there was any sense in it?" Sam answered her, gloomy-like. "Most likely there ain't any sense in it. Hit's liable to be just the will of the Lord."

"Then I'd as well quit squirming soon as late," Aunt Matt gave in. "You boys got to be moving, too?"

They were down off the fence and a piece up the path when Waits answered: "Yes'm, we'd best push on. Come on 'n' go with me, Sam 'n' Aunt Matt. I aim to do a heap o' moving my ownself."

"Take it kindly, Waits," Sam answered, "but your kind o' moving ain't same's our kind, that there's profit and advantage in. Bid you good venture."

When they had left the place out of sight, Fayre turned loose a thought. "All the profit in it is in Sam's head. Poor old Aunt Matt. May I never treat Bess that way."

"How you planning to keep Bess—supposing you win her?"

"As well ask a—a—a huckleberry bush," Fayre told him, "but I'll figure it someway so's not to wear her down old 'n' witherdy before her time. She's built little 'n' quick, like Aunt Matt must 'a' been; but I aim to keep my woman pretty-looking."

"Easy talk, Fayre Jones, efn you've got it in you to do it."

"I like for folks to think there's somewhat to me, even when I know myself 'taint much," Fayre owned.

They took the hill trail where it headed up onto the next mountain, and Waits went first, harkening to Fayre's words as they overtook him.

"Mother women all like me," Fayre said, "maybe because my own mother died when I was a little tad and all the neighbors took a hand in raising me. Likely efn she'd lived I'd have brought her sorrow, but her

being dead I cherished her thought and tried to act nice to other boys' mothers. So they like me." After walking some more steps he said, "Men don't—much."

"Seems to me," Waits threw over his shoulder, "the thing you want is for Bess to like you. Is her head set that way?"

"I never could be all Bess thinks I am, but I aim to work my life long to hinder her from finding out her mistake."

"I reckon you 'n' Bess'll get along fine," Waits told him, "—being as neither of you is strong-minded enough to quar'l."

Fayre had the thought, maybe Waits was laughing at him, but more than likely he meant it friendly.

They had come at this time to the top of the walkable ways, where they could see hills as many as eye could look at. Fayre thought about turning him to go back.

It was a wild-like place, for the first-growth hardwood on the slopes below had not been cut over. There were yellow poplars, growing mightily high before ever branches started on them, and bigger around the base than a man could believe. Lesser trees sheltered with them, and scrub was close interwoven and threaded with vines. But on the side where they walked there was a rock wall going straight down to a deep gulch, and, where the path led, the near edge was hidden by an overhang of growing bushes and vines, so a man might take the walkable path not twelve inches from the overthrust, yet feel himself upland.

"There's a power of gopherwood hereabout,"

Fayre noticed. "That's what Noah builded the Ark out of. Never will rot, won't that wood."

"'You know a heap," Waits said, and looked for Fayre to trip him over and start a rippit for a play-game.

But at that time Fayre was busy with tripping himself up. He fell over a crossvine and was gone from view.

Over the rock went Fayre, waterfalling down the steep a sight to bless you. He clutched at bushes that gave way and went with him; he hooked onto stones that rolled from under; he turned into a perfect mix-up of a man with first legs and then arms waving and no head to be seen whatever.

"You hurt?" Waits called after him. But Fayre was yet busy turning over. When all was quiet again: "You hurt?" Waits shouted a second and a third time.

No answer came from the bundle that was Fayre Jones, heaped on the rock at the foot of the gorge; and Waits was himself ready to go down to him, when Fayre started to unwind. He made a slow business of it.

" 'Taint in reason he's broke a arm or a leg," Waits said to himself; "they'd bend, maybe, but not snap off. Hey! Fayre Jones, what part did you get hurt in?"

After a long spell, when Fayre had felt himself one piece at a time, he sent up word: "Nuh-uh; don't seem to be damaged any. But Hell's banjer, efn I ain't lost my folding knife!"

Waits undertook to laugh; but Fayre took the sulks

about the knife gone out of his pocket, and when Waits said he'd help him climb back up, he wouldn't so much as offer at it.

" 'Taint worth the slavery," he said. "I was aiming to turn back about here anyway. Efn I'd known a step or two back all I know now, I'd have gone back afore. I'll just make my way from down here. Wish you a farewell and a good venture."

"Better go with me, Fayre Jones."

"Not this day, Waits Lowe."

"Then a pleasant farewell and a good summer's sun!"

CHAPTER V

It seemed to Wait-Still-on-the-Lord that upon this very day summer was born of spring. It was so lusty new, so fresh and full of woods noises—chirps and chitterings made by the world of little things. He lay down to rest him under a tulip tree, near to the edge of a water-stream that fed into Green Glade Creek. His eyes followed a nuthatch running circles up a tree bole, while it looked under every moss patch for its dinner, and cried out: "Yank! Yank! Yank-yank-yank!" after it found a bite. There was a kingfisher over on the other side, and yonder went a flicker, beauty-proud in the sun. A squirrel chased itself into a hollow root; and a dragon-fly hung about right in front of Waits's eyes just to plague him for being two-footed and tied to the earth. The jar-fly started humming this very minute and hour, but he was yet cold and weak-voiced.

Where the squirrel had gone Waits let his eyes follow, and then he saw the back of a man, half-way hidden by a laurel bush. The man was fishing in a quiet pool below. But Waits was not minded to call him to look 'round, so he left him be; and the man stayed still, with his frousty brown coat wrinkled over his shoulders, and his tangled white hair trailing over the collar. This was all Waits could see of him, save a

decaying hat, and seeing this much he knew it was Uncle Shannon Budd, which was why he did not feel the call to stir him up.

Waits slept. The shadow where he lay traveled on, till it let the sun burn down upon him. Waking, he looked straightway up into the sky, where the clouds were so fine-pretty and white against the blue that they fairly pulled him to his feet, and he got up to move along, without rightly knowing if he was ready.

Shortest way was over the branch, so he stepped half-way to a mossy rock that stuck out of the water and was safe enough, until, instead of stepping on over, he commenced to think—would the rock bear him—and as a consequence fell in to the length of his knees.

Then the figure of old Uncle Shannon Budd unfolded itself and came upstream, scattering swear-words that flew around like spent bullets, and did no more harm.

"Efn I was you," Waits told him, "I'd quit raising blisters in the air. Weren't catching a thing, you weren't. Why don't you go on home 'n' put in a crop?"

"I was about to catch me a sheepshead," Uncle Shannon made lament. "Been about to catch him all morning, 'n' now you come lumping 'n' tumbling, 'n' now he's plumb gone away."

"Never was there," Waits said. "See how you lie! Ary sheepshead ever got into that little old pool would be liable to stub his nose so bad he'd lose his mind. Minnows is all there is."

When a person tells a fishing man he is seeking

minnows, he gets out of words, so Uncle Shannon just stood shaking both fists at Waits and looking the picture of a down-gone Santa Claus that hadn't been washed since last Christmas.

"You got time to waste!" Waits teased the old man. "I been watching you set there two-three hours 'n' better, and you ain't got ary bite."

Uncle Shannon was too old and weak in the head to stay at the top of his mad long, so he came down and said: "Well for you to say wasting time, Waits Lowe! My time's anyway too val'able to waste three hours of it watching some other fellow not get ary bite." He sat down upon a big rock and shook master.

Waits began to think hardly of himself for stirring the old man to wrath.

"Don't you put ary price on words of mine, Uncle Shannon," he said. "I never aimed to fall in the water and send your fish agley."

"Efn you never *aimed* to, that's another ear o' corn," Uncle Shannon said. Then on a suddenty: "Come on and go home with me!"

"I'm not against it," Waits granted, and they went on together. They broke through the thickety patch on the far side of Green Glade and held northerly towards where lay the shameful barn Uncle Shannon took for his house. When they had come upon a walkable way, Uncle Shannon went foremost, talking like a running stream, and laying out about each 'n' everything in the news.

"That torn-down Lum Morgan's been hauling out his tie-timber across my place 'n' ruined the road I

cut out last fall for my ownself. I don't care for his using it in dry weather, but a man can't supply all his neighbors in the matter of roadpaths, and Lum ain't got the sense of a tree-toad about cutting up a wet way."

Waits brogued along back of him, careless of what was said, and watched the leaf buds swell on the trees. "Seems like the leaves is shaking themselves and hanging out to dry faster than a man can look! And in the midst of all such business, if there ain't a Judas tree, flaming up sib to the setting sun!"

"Happen the Devil will take his own before so long," Uncle Shannon hoped. "But then there's the tribe he's spawned left behind him for a sad country to deal with. The Lord in His mercy got Creed murdered, but there's all the rest, not to count the Bracys, which is sib to 'em. Heard tell there's come a red-headed Bracy as well-favored as Satan before he fell, and as mean as he was afterwards. That low stock runs to a red-head every third and fourth generation of them that hates. . . ." Uncle Shannon stopped because he had gotten lost in his own words.

"What kind of grease d'you use on your tongue?" Waits asked the old man.

"My wife's what started it. A man don't learn to loose his tongue in a lone house top of a mountain; but come a wife and he's bound to practise or go under."

Waits thought—supposing Dena should be that way. Not liable to, but supposing. "Keep on talking," he told Uncle Shannon, "and soon or late you may let out some good sense. Let's easy us down here a spell."

He sat him down upon a new-cut stump, but the old man kept limping on, and Waits was bound to get up and follow.

"Come I stop moving, the trouble it is to start again, due to the rheumatiz, would surprise a person that's never ailed from it," he told Waits. "And I'm a good man, too," he added, as if that were a consequence. "Not a good go-to-meeting man, but a good hard-swearing, treat-you-square or shoot-you-dead man; and she claimed she didn't want any truck with such." Waits knew he had stopped talking about the rheumatism, which the Lord might lay on any man, and started upon his wife.

Waits left his head to wander, and by the time he was listening again Uncle Shannon was in the middle of his story.

"She got as hot as meat in a skillet. Leaping mad she was. She just le'p up at me. 'Leave her le'p,' thinks I; so I left her a spell to keep house by her ownself. She made the house so hot for me I was obliged to travel to cool myself. And her living in my house free, you might say, and claiming it wasn't fit to keep a hog in, let alone a wife-woman."

"Keep talking," Waits put in, using his own breath to laugh with, while the old man shared his betwixt his story and his climbing. "Keep talking."

"After so long a time, I come on back. So she went. And I got along well enough for a spell; and come a time she got a divorcement from me and I thought no more about it." He stopped at the gate of his torn-down home-place. "Come on in," he bade Waits. "She's

away and you 'n' me'll fix us a mess o' supper and a new fire ere we lay down."

There was cold bread and meat in the house, and a dish of apple butter to sweeten all; and Uncle Shannon made coffee fresh. They ate the meal without talking, and after that they sat on the bench by the fire hearth. And while Waits cut gimcrack things with his knife out of some acorns he pulled out of his pocket, Uncle Shannon took up his talking as if he'd never left off.

"Well-sir—one day in she come walking, saying here she was back. And I'm not putting on but I was ready for her, with the gorm the place had gotten itself in by that time. So she stayed 'n' first we know neighbor talk was raised against us living together. Efn both of us hadn't plumb forgot that fool divorcement and was no more married than a pair of squir'ls! Still 'n' all, where was she to go whilst we was getting wed again? So we stayed the way we was 'n' time run on. One day come Sheriff up our way. Time he come to the door: 'Is the old man home?' asks he. 'Reckon so—come on in,' she says. 'Tell him Sheriff to see him,' he says. 'Don't uneasy yourself—he'll see you,' says she. A hour come 'n' gone, and Sheriff tells her, 'Look-a-here! I thought you said your old man would see me.' 'He did see y',' she answers him. 'He seen y' through a chink in the hinder wall. But not much liking your looks he went out 'n' up the mountain quite a piece ago.' "

At last being run out of words Uncle Shannon dozed, but before he could fall off the bench he'd wake wide

up again. For a perfect hour Waits watched him wake and sleep, and then said: "Efn she's back, where is she?"

"Helping with a new-born child across on Brimstone. She's a fine helping woman that-a-way, and I'm glib to lend her. Believe I'll lay me down. Pick you a quilt 'n' choose either that yonder bed, or the floor here by the fire." He lay down upon his own bed and slept heavily. Waits gathered a quilt from the heap in the far corner, and lay upon it by the fire.

With the early light Waits stirred and crept from the house, fearing to wake the old man, and not wishing to take another meal for that he was poor. But Uncle Shannon was quick of ear, and called him again within. While he set the coffee to boil, and put all the leftments of bread before his guest, he fussed master.

"Didn't think you'd dishonor a poor man's house by acting so! Come there's a crumb o' food whatsoever, no guest o' mine goes off withouten his breakfast. Do as you're bid, eat all that now, it's yours; and pretty soon the old woman'll be back to bake me some more. Come to that pass, I'd bake me some my ownself. Back in the army I recall one time. . . ."

He kept on about the old fighting times and would not touch food, though Waits left a share on the table; but made as if to be taken up by his own story.

"Little more," he grumbled, seeing the leftments, "and you'll be calling me same color as Columbus Morgan—and he's a poorlander of the first growth. Well, efn you're bound to start out, fare you well, and an easy march!"

"Better come go 'long with me, Uncle Shannon!"

"Not this day, Waits Lowe! My years is too many for far traveling."

So Waits dropped down the far side of the hill, and left the last scene he knew of the home country, and set forward on his way.

CHAPTER VI

In the midst of his high-hearted journeying, he came upon a wagon, loaded with tie-timber and bedded in the mud of the road. And the driver was sitting upon the bankside, given up, while the two sorry mules stood head-hung in their traces.

"Need more arm-strength?" Waits hailed.

"Reckon I need something, God knows," spoke the man, and as he came down to the wagon again, Waits saw it was Lum Morgan; furthermore he noticed that he was wasted with sickness and the poor living of the foregone winter. He had snaky eyes in a yellow face, and a figure gant as a bean-pole. The skin on his arms and neck was tanned brown and dry; his muscles were stringy and his bones were sharp. Now he took fresh hold upon the spokes of the hinder-wheel, Waits grasped those of the other side in his strong hands, and Lum cried out to his mules. The wheels sucked at the wet dirt and slowly turned. When they came near stopping again Lum gave a great cry—"Hi—Hi—Hi-yar!"—and the mules strained onward and the wagon was free.

"Hit heartens a person to have a neighbor's hand," Lum said in thanks. "There's three more bog-holes to get caught in and right smart of a hill this side of

Virge Howard's Place; but I reckon I'll come it by night. What-all's the matter with them ties?"

Waits had fallen to counting the ties, and when he had the number: "Twelve," he said. "Lazy man's load always meets accidents. Take shame to yourself, Lum Morgan, for putting above eight back o' them mules, with this gouted road 'n' all."

"You'd not be jealous to make this road twice your ownself," gave back Lum Morgan. "Takes all a man's time."

"I'd liefer go a double trip of six ties; and it would be a heap shorter than getting gormed in every mud patch."

"All is, I'd sooner set right here than go either forward or back." And Columbus sat him again upon the wayside, drooping with tiredness and looking all of a piece with the woods.

Waits gave warning: "Some person's liable to pick you out for a bump of firewood and take you home and burn you up. Where do you want these tie timbers should go?"

"Over beyond Clear Fork, and out by Four Mile Switch, this side Preacher Virge Howard's Place. Hit's a long piece out, but I got kin over to Robbins' Gap where I aimed to spend the night. You could go there."

"I'll start the mules 'n' wagon back by whosoever's coming," Waits said. And while he was yet speaking, Lum rolled over and was asleep. And Waits mounted the timber, snapped the short-thong whip and rode off toward the outside.

"Seems like them poorlanders all time getting a disease against work!—Hi-yar! Hi-yar! Hi!"

He gave the mules to drink from the Clear Fork, and started up the mountain, slowly through the shadowed road at the base, round the first corner, about the hairpin turn and up, up into the sunlight, where the giant balsams reached their tips to touch the edge of the roadway from the ravine two hundred feet below. Waits heard the sound of a car coming down. Directly it came in sight dropping from rock to rock and rattling as it rolled. At an outside curve, where a bunch of loose rock had been shoved outward to make the road wide enough to pass around, he had to pull his mules hard in and tilt the wagon of ties so it leaned against the hillside. The car shaved by, and the stranger clinging to its wheel took time to give Waits a look fitten to blast.

"Efn he's set on raising him a crop o' trouble," Waits told the mules, "all he needs is to look me over that way just once more. I've got the right here, and him 'n' his car ought properly to have gone over the edge sooner than crowd me in." He walked across to the edge of the road and peered down to where Clear Fork ran, two hundred feet and better below him. "A man can't handily blame him," he smiled, " 'Tis right smart of a drop, 'n' more 'n' likely would plumb have ruined him."

He started to work getting the lower wheels out of the rain gulley by the bankside. It took most of that day's light, for the mules were trashy beasts and scarcely could be got to strain the wagon of ties back

into the road. By the time Waits had won to hill's crest the sun was going down in fire-red glory. He knew he could not make it so far as the Gap this day, for the road was powerfully gouted by the rains and the draught was heavy. Night fell just a piece beyond the third bog-hole, and he had spread his coat on the tie timber for a bed, when he heard a fiddle scraping the top of a tune, and saw a light back in the woods "Must be there's a play-party at some school house tonight," he said gaily, for it was in his mind to go any place where lightheartsomeness was. He threaded betwixt the trees down into the sink of land where stood the lighted house, but when he came near the place a great loneliness wrapped around him.

From the house came happy shouts of men and shrill cries of women, with a stamping of feet that tramped with heavy rhythm to the fiddle-playing. The fiddler called: "Ladies change 'n' gents the same!" and the steps sounded more roughly, with now and then a heavier stamp to mark time.

Waits yearned to go in and dance, but he was a stranger in these parts, and it would not be fitten to enter unasked. Still, his body bent to the tune, easy and limp, pulled this way and that by the varying sound. He trod the dance lightly—met it halfway—felt it overcome him, and at last gave way all at once and flung himself back and across the moonlit space, unmindful of the staring eyes of some men who had drawn nigh the door. Now the dancers withindoors were singing to the fiddle's tune:—

"Chickens a-crowing in Sourwood Mountain,
Hay diddy ump, diddy ump dum day!
Get your dogs 'n' we'll all go a-huntin',
Hay diddy ump, diddy ump dum day!

Raccoon canter 'n' possum trot,
Hay diddy ump, diddy ump dum day!
Black dog wrastle with a hickory knot,
Hay diddy ump, diddy ump dum day!

I got a girl in the head o' th' hollow,
Hay diddy ump, diddy ump dum day!
But she won't come, 'n' I won't follow—
Hay diddy ump, diddy ump dum day!

The fiddler came to the end, and Waits stopped with the last note, feeling himself slip back into his stiff, everyday body. When the dance played he was full of grace, swinging like a leafed branch on a tree with the wind calling through it; with the tune stopped he was that same branch, dead upon the ground, its lesser pieces hard and clumsy, and all without motion.

"As well go in," said one of the watching men. "Hit's a poor kind of fun we got here; but the fiddling's fitten for dancing."

The others rested silent, but there was a smile in the eyes of one—a smile of sureness and set-up-ness that raised Waits's temper to boiling.

"Come out with it, whatever you got to say," he told the man.

And the man gave answer: "Efn happen I owned a hat like yours—which my mother taught me better—I'd use it to set a hen."

Now hats are delicate things, and Waits's hat was as pert a one as any this side of the ridge. It was pinned up with a thorn and was cleanswept and not neglectful. Furthermore, none should do it dishonor, even should it be the sorriest hat ever was seen.

Waits went over to the man and brushed him out of the way so as to enter the door of the house. And the man struck out at him, and Waits thrust him with the flat of his hand upon his face, so that he fell back upon the ground and lay there. And Waits entered in at the door.

The inside of the schoolhouse was scarcely to be seen for the hantle of people. They were homemade boys and girls, taking their pleasure easily, freeing workbound muscles in the dance, and using this neighborship to practise tongues that else had gone dumb on lone farmsteads. The faces of the men were weather-rough and red, and those of the girls were pale, with large eyes that tonight were apt for fun. All the company was clad in common work clothes. The men had on overalls and blue shirts, with a coat pulled on at the last minute by way of adornment; their feet were cased in their common plough-boots. The girls had stopped only so long as it took to brush their hair smooth and to pin a fresh white collar around the neck of their calico dresses. And while they danced they tossed words across the room, shouting and calling to one another.

Two oil lamps hung from the ceiling, but the place was mostly lighted by naked candles, that danced with the draughts, and seemed to get knocked topside down

as a habit. And why they didn't set the whole company a-fire was a surprise. Up on the platform, where the teacher's desk should have been, there was a bucket of spring water with a new tin dipper floating on it, where anybody thirsty could stop for a drink. But Waits noticed that mostly they went outdoors to take a drink of whatever they might happen to have brought with them.

Now the fiddler was playing *Gypsy Davy:*

Late one night the squire come home
A-asking for his lady;
His servant said: "She's gone to roam,
She's gone with Gypsen Davy."
Rattle-tum a-Gypsen, Gypsen, Gypsen,
Rattle-tum a-Gypsen Davy!

O, come back, my own dear love,
O, come back, my honey,
I'll lock you up no more to rove,
But I'll give you lands and money!
Rattle-tum a-Gypsen, Gypsen, Gypsen,
Rattle-tum a-Gypsen Davy!

Waits entered into the dance and forgot all else.—

I won't come back your own dear love,
Nor I won't come back your honey—
Nor I wouldn't give a kiss from the Gypsen's lips
For all your lands and money!
Rattle-tum a-Gypsen, Gypsen, Gypsen,
Rattle-tum a-Gypsen Davy!

When first Waits came in, the dancers twisted to look upon the stranger, but quickly grew neglectful again, seeing him but a common man of their own race.

And as he mingled with the company some called a "How d'ye!" to him as they passed. Now being out of all breath he had to stand still, while he watched them dance the Rinkey Fodder.

The fiddler boy went from one tune to another. First there would be a mournful repeating piece that moaned on and on, while the heavy shoes of the dancers rubbed back and forth across the floor; then on a suddenty the tune would burst out like a river rushing to the falls and all danced eager, red-hot flings and reels—each man or girl singly—skip, balance and stamp, everyone dancing to suit the way he felt, but all coming together on the stamp that marked time. Then while the riot was such that the breath began to fail, the fiddler dropped into a lonesome tune like the wind singing to the pine trees, and all would rest lazy-like, slower and softer as if gone in a dream, till they leaned against the wall to recall breath. Across the room they talked back and forth together, while the old women who looked on warned the young folks, and argued amongst themselves.

"What'd the Preacher say to these doings?"

"I don't see harm in it."

"Dancing's no more than making happy movements with the feet."

"You'd have 'em dance in bodily fear of Judgment Day!"

"They can dance tonight and repent some handier time!"

"Hit's a surprise the house wouldn't fall and crush us all. Efn Preacher was to come in. . . ."

"He'll likely give us a blood-dripping talk some Sunday. Hit'll be a long 'n' hard trail for him to save our souls for us."

"Reckon that's his business, however; and no trade comes easy."

It was amazing the way the old women stood against the wall, hour after weary hour, looking at the young folks, and now and then patting to the fiddle when came a catchy part. The player ran through *Rocky Mountain Top* as fast as he could go, and Waits danced it with a girl from out Glen Hazard till one of the Gillow boys, who had brought her over, came and took her for himself.

"How d'ye, Waits Lowe!—You down here getting damned with the rest?"

"Same's yourself, Ed Gillow; hit might maybe not be wrong, but efn it is we're lost a'ready, and may as well keep on a spell."

Just ere they had caught breath the fiddle was taken with a spell of mischief and started up a tune that was impudent as a rabbit in out season, and they had no help but to go on again. After that came a ballet piece, with all singing the repeat lines and stamping out the measure. Then there was a treat of deep pie made of apples and new spring berries, and the woman who had made it came over to Waits and gave him a piece because of his dancing. While they stood and ate he felt foolish and without words. "Efn my tongue could be brought to work as easy as my legs—happen it'd take me some place," he thought. And directly he told the woman: "My name's Lowe—Waitstill

Lowe, and I'm come out of Glen Hazard to try to content myself in travel and see the why of the earth 'n' what's in it."

"How come you not working?"

"The mill burned where I did work. Now efn a job o' work overtakes me I make out to do it; but I'm going far 'n' beyond, and broad 'n' high, and I'm shet of all pent-up-ness."

The woman looked him over. "Hit's spring got into you," she said. "Spring—that's all 'tis. Come summer you'll slow down; come fall you'll start back; come winter you'll be giving thanks to crawl into your home-place."

"All the same, I got to go. I got to find out the other end of the world. . . ."

"And that's liable to be right by the stepstone of your own house as 'tis any place else."

Waits thought about this for a spell, but it didn't rest with his mind, and the fiddle pulled his thoughts back.

"That boy does the best I ever heard," he told the woman. "For a common boy he can use a fiddle fit to crack. He handles the stick smoothly like and makes music to beat over yonder. He just naturally wipes it outen the fiddle-box."

"He's been took that way since a little tad," she answered. "He's been up so far as Massengale and won prizes from the town fiddlers. He'll play any piece you can think to set a name to, and never will make a bobble. He's just a homemade boy, too. Seems he's just took that way, same's you're took with danc-

ing, and same's the Devil will take you both, when the time comes."

Waits put his plate on a shelf back of him. "Good pie to feed dancing folk, efn you don't hold with it," he made soft answer.

Her face gathered into a smile, while she said: "Even the Devil's tools got to eat efn they are to last out their time; and 'taint on account of your dancing —but it's just the young uns *being* young that makes me feel heart-easy towards 'em."

Then the fiddler started a dance that drew with every pull of the bow, till Waits cried out:

"Hi-yar! A-waugh! Hear ye! Hit's sharp as a thorn!" And he broke into the dance, and capered in such-wise that all cleared back off the floor to see him alone. And they cried out for more, so he danced them *New Trousers* till they laughed master.

Soon thereafter Waits went forth into the night and back to the road to climb upon the tie-timber and sleep. But the timber and mules and wagon were gone from there—also his coat.

CHAPTER VII

PREACHER VIRGIL HOWARD came riding toward Glen Hazard the following week. He rode upon a scandalous thin white horse that had wintered with him above Clear Fork; and Preacher himself was not fat, since he his ownself had been above Clear Fork for seventy years. He carried his head well back, and even beneath a slouchy black hat a person could see that his head was high above the large flat ears, and he had a round high forehead more fitten for feeling than for reason. Directly, he took his hat off to let the fresh wind roach back his white hair. It was brushed into wild wings that looked as if they might maybe fly away with his head from his shoulders, only his stern eyebrows and solemn blue eyes forbade. The eyes changed with the Preacher's mood from wide and blue and dreaming, to nearly shut in laughter, when none could tell what color they might be for their sparkle, and other times they would flash in rage, with little red sparks deep in them. Now that his hat was off, a person could see to read the lines of his face—how they wrinkled the eyes, and how the mouth was deep-lined to see the fun of life, and its cares too. His mouth could not properly be seen, because of the beard and moustache, but it held them firmly. It was the nose that made folk say that the Preacher must have been a

rip-snorting and most survigrous young-un before he caught religion. It stood high and double-curved, and met the moustache in a clean straight edge. And it was this nose the young-uns still feared, even such times as Preacher's eyes went soft with fellowly feeling for their sins.

Thus Preacher Virgil Howard rode through the hills this sunny morning, singing as he came, and so in time he looked upon Lowes' Place from the crest of Cragg Hill; and to ease his horse down the hard slope, he took his lank body to the ground and walked beside. It was now to be seen that for all his years he was staunch and firm-knit.

The ten miles from Clear Fork to White Oak being covered especially to 'ware Rashe Lowe about his boy, Virgil, beholding Rashe at the door of his house, stopped by the gate.

Rashe hailed him. "Enter and rest you!"

"No, I believe not. I'll be passing on."

"Best linger a spell."

"Hit'd take longer to clean the mud offen me than I got time to sit for."

"Spare us some of your time."

Virgil now turned his horse loose to find it some new green-stuff in the woods, and himself came slowly down the path.

"Warm days for this early," he said, while he sat him down upon the log step by Rashe.

"Too warm. See them fool fruit trees—out in leaf-bud a'ready, and late frost liable still to fall. A apple tree ain't got no sense."

The day smelled rich and earthy, and a blue tit spoke one note at a time from where it balanced on the fence beyond. The old men sat for a long space, watching things grow and harkening to earth-sounds.

Then Virgil said: "Speaking of no sense, Waits was at my place this past two-three days, and spent some nights."

Rashe was neglectful, and did not make answer. When time had gone by so that Virgil should not think him over-eager, he asked: "Ary job o' work overtook him yet?"

"Seems he picked up a load of tie-timber for Columbus Morgan."

"Which task I misdoubt me paid him wages in his pain and trouble, efn Lum's the same man he always was."

"Let that be as may be," Virgil answered peaceably, "but here's what come to pass. Waits undertook to carry the goods out to Four Mile Switch, and at the end of that day, not getting so far, he stopped over to a play-party at the sink in Robbins' Gap, and when he was through dancing 'n' fooling, he come on out and all was gone away."

"Tie-timber?"

"Tie-timber, mules, wagon, Waits's coat 'n' bundle —gone, clean licketty, and not a whisper left to tell whence."

Barsha Lowe had this long time been standing within the door back of the men, listening to the talk, and now she pulled her a chair.

"I guess maybe he made out to find 'em," she said.

"Yes, ma'am, Mis' Lowe, he did indeed; but when he got through he come on up to my place and sat him down on the well-edge and laughed master for reason of his own foolishness. For what but this did he do: he set out walking back to Lum Morgan's Place to 'ware him his goods was lost in the world—and him not rightly knowing where Lum dwelt he spent the best part of that night finding it. Then him 'n' Lum started to get to Four Mile Switch, in case the mules might have gone on without turning. No sooner'd they got there than the train that rightly ought to have picked up the ties went sailing on by, and what Lum didn't say to Waits about loosing the timber out of his hand like that wasn't worth setting fire to. Lum's mouth ain't no hymn-book even efn it does open 'n' shut."

Rashe stretched a hand into a tow sack around the door. "Eat a apple," he said, handing one to Virge. "You'll be dried out with all this talk over my worthless."

Virgil ate the apple down to nothing, and then said: "Directly Lum started to go on to his home-place and Waits went back to Robbins' Gap, to kind of look around like. First news you know, he come slap-dangle on them mules 'n' wagon 'n' tie-timber, a-standing a little piece down the road from where he'd left 'em. And the sorry mule-beasts was about to fall down. Seems a man he'd had a ruction with at the play-party had leaded them mules off down a little piece into a hollow to aggravate Waits's mind. Waits said he didn't know this man's name, but he had a eerie way with him,

though well-favored enough in face, and they'd taken a natural distaste to each other on first sight. O' course Waits's mad rose up, seeing the mule-beasts treated so just out o' spite to him. . . ."

Barsha broke in to lament that Waits had made a hasty fool of himself by not looking round handy ere he stirred up Lum Morgan.

Virgil kept on: "Waits wasn't best pleased; but he come to content himself enduring the day or two or three he was up at my house healing."

Barsha's chair creaked while she stiffened up, but she'd have gone up the chimney like a witch ere she'd have asked flat out, "Healed of what?"

Rashe chopped at the stick he had been playing with and carved it perfectly in two pieces, but he picked up another and kept on with that.

Virgil said: "Well-sir! that's what I been coming to. Waits got the tie-timber down to the switch and fed the mules and sent 'em back to Lum by means of a passing boy going that way. I recall he said the boy had on a suit of washed-away overalls and a broken hat and he wondered efn such a losel could be trusted with so much goods; and I recall he said that himself was a unusual one to be saying so, after the fool he'd been just previous. So he told the boy to take 'em back to Lum's, and he come on back to my place and that's how I come to see him."

The Preacher gathered himself up and made as if going on, and Rashe said, "I take it kind you should step over to 'ware me about him. He's not scarcely worth it. His mother all the same's been in a dowie way

since he's been gone off. Mother-women is made to take it hard when the young-uns break away."

"I'll just be broguing along. I got a right far piece to go."

Barsha was going wild in her mind. "You're bid to dinner," she told Virgil in a flat voice, "efn you can stand our common food." Happen he'd stay, and after maybe might say what it was Waits needed healing from. She watched him from the tail of her eye.

"What's good enough for you is likely too good for me," he made gracious answer; and Barsha went back kitchen to fix up a company dinner for the sudden guest.

"Virge, what do you reckon's gotten into Waits?" Rashe grumbled, while he went on whittling at his stick.

After he'd settled for further visiting—"Springtime," Virge made answer.

"No," Rashe disagreed, "'taint that. I've had springtime my ownself—scandalous long years ago; and, bad as 'tis, this that Waits has got is worse. Hit's head as well as heart is troubling him. He is like to one who in sleep is found by him he dreads, and he's taken his trouble away—he's gone."

The noon sun stood over the hills and lent its grace to the fields; the fields threw back a light that touched the old cabin and made it a live thing and a place of human dwelling. The flowers starting up round about, and the bushes beginning to leaf in the garden-piece came perky in the scant warmth. Everything down

Lowes' hollow drank up the sun like it hadn't one minute to spare—and truly the sun would be gone directly from that place.

"What's gone's gone, Rashe; but I can see where the going away of your boy is something you can't let be. You've got to keep hitting at it—like old Newt Beechy firing at the moon. He failed of hitting it, but bullets kept falling back into the hollow around his house for a week after that. I felt like you, when my eldest-born got wildfire in his heels, but I've had five go off besides him, and I've come to see where, efn a boy can't content himself, as well be gone as set 'n' smooch.

"Of course," Virgil granted directly, "efn he's taken up with studying over things, *and* hit's springtime got into him to boot, almost anything's liable to happen. He's more'n likely in love, too. Love does half the mischief in this world 'n' hate does the rest, but it's plain discontentedness that makes things happen."

"Come on 'n' get your dinner," Barsha called to them.

When they sat round the table, Rashe said: "A blessing on this food!" as if the Lord might be at his elbow waiting orders; and to Virgil he said: "We fare poorly, but will be best pleased if you treat all as your own."

There was meat, and a plate of fried eggs, and boiled potatoes and bread, brown and hot out of the oven; and beans and beets and home-canned tomatoes, and pickle-hash and spring butter, with buttermilk and

coffee to drink; and, for sweet, Barsha had opened her last jar of pickled pears. Virgil did honor to the table by eating some of every dish and praising all.

When all were back around the door again, Barsha said: "He never said aught of turning home again, I reckon?" And this was as near as she dared get to asking flat-footed what harm had befallen her son.

"No'm, Mis' Lowe; can't say he did 'n' tell truth."

The sun already had passed away from the cabin and blue shadows had started down the slopes. The men looked at the shadows eating up the fields that lay slanting on the hillside; and on a suddenty Virgil laughed to himself, a slow bubble of a laugh as if he was boiling in his chest. And when he had had enough laughing, he left off and told them:

"Like I said, he come up to my place, but that was after a while. Betwixt the time he unloaded the tie-timber and sent the mules on back, and the time he got what was left of him up to my house, he'd been right smart active."

Barsha's chair squeaked again, and she hooked at the rug she was making as if it had to be done that minute.

"He got to studying about that man at the play-party, and the more he thought how the fellow'd made a fool of him over the mules the hotter he got. He set himself to find out the man, and come on him down by a store building at Robbins' Gap, where all were gathered waiting for the mail. And there the fellow stood, back against the post-office door, and held himself cool and quiet. And he started to make sport of Waits and

to brag before all how he'd baited him. Waits said it wasn't only his bragging by mouth, but he bragged with the very look of him. He was well-favored as sin, and a person'd feel all the time he was poison-laden—that's what Waits said.

"Still, all the quar'l Waits had was about Lum Morgan's tie-timber, and it don't do to smell out all the evil in a man when one sample will do you. So Waits circled around, and—soon's they knew what was—he whaled in. And this man dove into Waits so easy-like that it naturally turned Waits's temper sour—and you know how that can be."

Barsha moaned and Rashe nodded his head.

"Well-sir, they melled together right stoutly; and stormy speech and live words flew around from them that stood by, but never one was there to befriend Waits. And for that cause the Robbins' Gap man was getting all the cream. He come along easy, but he kept a-coming; and then he so far got the advantage of himself that he sung out 'n' named Waits a blistered foreigner, and that's what caused enough hot blood to flow in Waits's right arm to do what had to be done. 'I was in these parts ever your grandsir was panted,' Waits told him—'so be you *had* a grandsir and didn't come neat from the Black Daddy.' With that he struck out, and he never said any more since the man was past hearing; but walked on and dusted himself down, and left them that was his unfriends to pick up what he'd been fighting."

"That's Waitstill from his first hour," Rashe said, bending over his stick so Virgil would not see the pride

in his face. "That's the boy! That's the boy!—*as well do it as wish it done!*"

Barsha said: "We're beholden to you for sheltering him thereafter. . . ."

"I'm coming to that," Rashe cut her off.

Virgil feared that thanks were on the way, and gathered himself up from the step and stood over them.

"Where's the difference betwixt a boy of yours or mine, more or less? All is, I let him lay by 'n' watch his knuckles heal, and get some blackness from around his eye so he'd not look unsightly come he met up with strangers; and when he took the notion to journey on, I let him travel."

Then Virgil called his horse and mounted upon it and he rode into the laurel scrub by the short path to Glen Hazard.

PART way to the road top of Cragg Hill, the path branches two ways. The one that goes off yon way leads to White Oak beyond its narrows, and if a man follows it where it surrounds the hills it takes him on to Robbins' Gap, gin he walks along it far enough.

Hereabouts, Virge Howard got down from his horse and searched for a sprig of Joy o' the Mountain, for he had it in mind to take back a flower thing to his wife, because of his pride in her. She was blind of her eyes, but her hands were glib to much flower things, and the smell of spring growings was her joy.

While the old man was yet stopping and putting back the leaves with gentle hands, there came another

man up yon path and stood over above him. And Virgil, unwitting of any standing there, yet began to feel eerie and straightened up to see what might be the cause.

A tall young man stood by him, loose of limb, sure of his ownself, with bright eyes so burning into the old man that before he knew what was, he was saying to him: "Hunting Joy o' the Mountain—aimed to take a sprig home to my wife, bless 'n' praise her." And, directly, since the man's eyes did not move, he said again: ". . . hunting Joy o' the Mountain."

Never in all his life long had Virgil Howard given out what he did nor why—least of all to a point-blank stranger. Some power in this man made him speak against his will and judgment. The man's eyes were narrow-set under straight brows, and over his square forehead a bush of red-gold hair shone like a crown. As Preacher Howard looked, words came to his mind: ". . . and he was twenty and five years old when he began to reign and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord."

Virgil shook himself back to everyday, and the man stood still in a slanted ray of sun looking as if he might slide up it any minute.

"Give you good day," he said, moving on up the hill.

When Virgil got again upon his horse, he had no way but to overtake the man, who strode ahead and held his own pace until the wide road was reached. "Happen you're making your way to Glen Hazard?" he asked, when they went along side by side; and he told his name and where-from.

"Burl Bracy's my name, and I've come this day out of Robbins' Gap to stay a while with some cousin-kin in Glen Hazard—Morgan name is. Likely you're acquainted?"

"Not much good's ever said of Morgans hereabouts," Virgil honestly warned him, "but most likely you know, being sib. Can't say you favors any."

When Bracy looked up at him, Virgil could see where his eyes were tawny brown like some wild beast's, and they caught the sun in flecks, and sparkled. The man's mouth broadened into easy laughter—a mouth a woman would marry and run off with.

"That makes no matter," Bracy said, "Nearest kin may be worst enemies yet, but I started to see them, and then there's that girl they got."

There was something in his voice that only a poor-stock man would be guilty of, for of all the unwritten law of the hill country, the safety and honor of women is most kept.

"O' course I own the Morgans is poorlanders," the stranger granted, "and reason is they already married through 'n' through till their generation come nigh to failing. Plenty trashy tales going round about 'em."

The Preacher on a suddenty swung around in his saddle toward him, while sharply he said: "Take shame, Sir, to run down your own kith to me that's a stranger to you."

Bracy tossed his shoulders. "What else to say, with Creed that had the fortune to get killed, and Dite, scandalous mean and ripening for Hell, and the old man himself nought but a shambling moldwarp."

Virgil took a distaste for this man who could so talk of the kin he was on his way to be guest to. But he rode on, quiet and not meddling. And directly Burl Bracy went on: "Passed me by a fine-pretty homestead a while back, where is a choice place for girls. I asked me at the house how about getting some dinner, and the least girl 'n' prettiest ran and called her sister, and that one turned me off, saying I'd do as well at neighbor Bart's. She had fine grace of body but was scarce so fair as the other. But, Man-Sir! the way she stood up when she told me to be getting along! Hit would just draw a man back to keeping asking for things, the fine way she has of telling him No!"

He laughed in such manner that Virgil wished the red slant of sun was a river of fire to coast him back to Hell; and then Virgil recalled he was a preacher, whose business, whatever it might be, was not to damn a stranger on first disliking.

Peaceably he said: "That would be Homer Howard's girls; cousin kin of mine, me being Virgil Howard." The man walked idly by him, and soon the preacher asked: "Since you are out of Robbins' Gap, happen you see the fight betwixt our Waits Lowe and that torn-down scoundrel?"

After Bracy had looked at Virgil and away again, he spoke as one having oil upon his tongue, and he said: "Surely to goodness I did—and the beating your neighbor give to the ruffian was a pleasant sight to see." He spat as if a memory of blood mixed with the oil on his tongue. "Where-all would the young fellow live hereabouts?" he questioned.

And Virgil, who was Heaven-simple when any chanced to praise his friends, said: "He has gone out and beyond, and no telling where to, or when he'll be back. What you cursing over? Ruined your foot on a sharp rock, did you?"

They came to a last dividing of the road, where it falls over Cragg Hill and into Glen Hazard. Virgil took the left going, upon the single trail surrounding Red Hill.

"Good venture to you!" he cried to the stranger.

"And to you always," Bracy answered him, while he peered down the hill to see where the town might be. "Dirty hole!" he told himself as he started down, "but granted its citizens are all honest-innocent as yonder, it'll be made to do." And he looked back to where the figure of Preacher Howard was black above him against the evening sky—just a shadow maybe, passing out of his way.

CHAPTER VIII

JUST before No. 6 was due to run next morning, the townsmen began coming down all sides into Glen Hazard and gathering in the store that was kept by Ranson Gillow. He had the Post Office, too, and one took time from the other so much that he used to get perfectly mix-headed. Luther Bart always claimed Ranson handed him a free pound of butter one day—going into the ice-box instead of the letter-box, being used to dealing out of both.

The store was gormed up after the winter-long using, and the ugly, fat heating stove was still up, greatly more hideous in its cold red rust than when it shone hot of a winter. The stove pipe, where it turned and staggered under the dirty roof, was a good deal sway-backed, and had to be looped up with pieces of wire. On the side walls were canned goods and drug medicines, and at the dark back, hardware things were stacked up from the floor and hung down from the roof so a person's life was apt to be done away with come he tried to hook anything down. That's what Ranson Gillow said; and it was the cause of his telling Rashe Lowe, when he wanted a barn lantern, to wait till Saturday when other folks would be wanting things off the roof, and he'd set his mind to make a business of it.

Back of the counters in the store were boxes and barrels with things in—might be nails or pickles or such. Up in front and across from the Post Office was dress goods and shoes and thread.

The Post Office its ownself had been sent down new from the factory long years since, and fitted staunchly upon the spare counter so there was room back of it for a table whereon Ranson was in the habit of keeping his books and spare papers and the book of blue checks. Time had warped the counter and the nests so they no longer agreed together, and it would have been an uneasy thing if there had been need to feed letters into the Post Office—for it teetered whenever it was touched. But Ranson handed out mail as it came, and only put left letters there.

The front of the store was made of door and two big windows. Ranson never could properly see any good in the show windows, and generally they were just a catch-basket for things he didn't know where else to put.

Ranson stood in his door this morning watching for Dite Morgan to tote over the mail from No. 6, and the townsmen came in past him like a regular called-up meeting. Directly he went back in and began tending customers with goods and talk, and when Dite got in with the mail he yet talked while he sorted letters.

"That old bridge by Aaron's Corner at last folded up with a highway truck."

"Who gave out that news?"

"That's like them outland bridge 'n' road builders. They'll g'arantee a bridge not safe, and do not a thing

else about it; and then five years or such a matter after, they get one of their own men killed driving a monstrous truck over it." Sheriff Joe Marks's voice sounded scorn of such doings.

Some voice at the back of the store said: "Hit's only a pity more o' they works don't fold up on 'em! Where at you keep the oil, Ranson?"

"Jim Foster that's conductor on No. 6 gave out yesterday how the iron cross-parts just pulled through the holes and folded over from each end like done-a-purpose—Oil's over back of the washtubs, Newt—and the truck went perfectly through the floor o' the bridge into water below.—Well, if 'taint by the tubs I'll have to hunt it for you come I get the letters give out.—"

"If that bridge had been under my care," Sheriff Joe Marks grunted, "I'd have put a stick o' dynamite under it soon's I see it not safe. Then all'd have to take the other road. So long as a bridge is tying one bank to the other it's in nature for folks to go over it."

"Who got killed?" John Bart asked.

There was a stirring in the store, while citizens bought what they had need of, and quarreled with Gillow about the price, which he claimed he couldn't help.

"Nobody of any special use, so far as I heard," Gillow said, answering John. "Come on and get your letters. I reckon I got 'em all divided. Did hear Waits Lowe was riding the truck, but . . ."

Rashe came to the front of the store with a half bushel of cow feed to weigh up. "See how you lie, Ran-

son Gillow! Don't you recollect Waits went out Robbins' Gap way and never was near Aaron's Corner?"

"Well," Gillow said, "hit don't shuck any o' my corn who was riding. Here's a letter for you, Newt; better hurry and see what is."

There was much living in the weather-worn faces of these mountain men, who mostly were gaunt-bodied and lithe, with well-set heads and steadfast eyes. Their clothes were common work clothes, clean and patched and hung upon figures made awkward by struggling with hard farming, and stooped with the weight of life. Their useful hands gripped hold of things they were carrying, as though ready to start right now, yet they might stand talking an hour or better with packs on shoulders, or tow sacks of feed in hand that an outlander would drop directly, and they'd never notice.

"Uncle Shannon Budd's mule's able to be around again, after being leaned up agin a hickory tree two-three days," Fayre Jones told each and every. "Hit would be a wonder it's ribs didn't make to saw the tree off. Ranson Gillow, where at's that medicine in the green box I got last week? Here's a yellow one looks just the same, but likely it's not, and I'd be apt to die efn I took it, which would be a pity. I don't see ary green box."

The storekeeper had the top of himself down in a box of excelshun, fetching out lamp chimneys, and he answered Fayre from where he was. "Dummered if I know where 'tis; whyn't you try that bottle o' pills up on the next-but-one shelf? They's powerful good for whatever it says on the label. Try some, I don't reckon

they'll kill you. Should they do so, of course, you'd not need to get ary other bottle."

"Anybody yet swapped words with this man outen Robbins' Gap?" Rashe Lowe asked.

"Sam Ewart did. He aimed to get him to work in Waits's place at the new mill. Hi-yar! Sam! What all did you learn out o' the young feller from the Gap?"

Sam rolled to the front of the store, walking like a bear with his legs a least bit bowed; and his voice came squeaking out of his heavy body: "Seems he's just go-abouting, aiming to pick him up a job o' work to do him over the summer. Says likely he'll buy him a piece o' land directly and stay around this town. I might maybe use him."

From out the packing, Ranson Gillow said: "Don't know as we'd choose to have him cootering around these parts."

While Sam tried to find words, several citizens helped by speaking at the same time:

"He's powerful looking—"

"No, he ain't, he's got spindling arms—"

"He's got a well-favored face—"

"And a brown pair o' eyes that look yellow in the sun like a cat's."

"He's scared o' cats. I seen him fair le'p offen a bench yestere'en come a cat rubbed betwixt his feet."

"Some folks is that way—a cat makes 'em scarey to think of, and efn they should touch against, they take a spasm."

Sam Ewart said: "We ain't talking cats. This man's name is Bracy—Burl Bracy, and he's out from Rob-

bins' Gap the last little while, but properly he was raised in the hinder mountains beyond."

The citizens let the foreigner drop, while they talked about news in the paper, and those who could read the letters they'd happened to get, gave out news from them to each and every.

"What work does he follow?" Fayre Jones wanted to know from up on the counter where he was swinging his legs.

"Says he can carpenter some, so be he can lay hands to a axe and saw. Speaking about Bracy—he ain't in here by a happenso?—But I mean, that's just what I'm saying: He ain't here, but next time you meet him there'll be a look in his eye like he was."

Sam had gotten his words all snarled up, but most that heard gathered his meaning, for they had learned already that the stranger was eerie.

Fayre Jones came down from the shelves, and he said: "A man can't like the looks of him—yet what's wrong? His hands is the strangest thing—all hooked over 'n' bent. I got to be mooching on. Come on 'n' go a piece with me, Uncle Rashe!"

But Rashe not hearing, Fayre Jones 'wared Gillow that he'd made off with two kinds of medicine to take against each other, so neither would do him hurt; then he carried himself forth from the store.

Ranson Gillow said: "That's the right of it. This Bracy is mellow to look at in the face, and with all that sunny hair atop his head, but neither I don't trust hands like that."

"Better be Dena Howard don't trust him," Uncle

Shannon Budd put in. He had stepped into the store in the middle of the talk, and none had noticed him.

"What's that you said?" Rashe Lowe asked, sharp-voiced. But Uncle Shannon had gone on to talk of something else, and paid no heed.

Uncle Shannon Budd would talk about everything in the world except cleaning himself, and Sheriff Joe Marks claimed: "I'd gar him get a hair-cut under the law, only it would be a pity to spoil Santa Claus; and I aim to fine him efn he don't change to another suit of clothes come year's end; just naturally can't abide to see that one decaying offen him over another winter. 'Taint healthy."

Uncle Shannon had now fallen into argument with Sam Ewart over a flying airplane Sam wanted to build, only seemed Aunt Matt wouldn't hear to his flying it, if so be ever he got it made.

"She says to this minute flying can't be done," he complained.

Uncle Shannon told him: "I never seen a thing in the way of man's flying gin he took the notion. When mankind give over stepping and took to wheels, it followed in nature he'd keep rolling 'em faster, till he took the craving to fly off in the air. Efn a stepping man can take to rolling, a rolling man can take to skimming, and any man that says . . ."

"Cool down, Uncle Shannon, cool down!" Rashe Lowe called out, "Nobody's saying ain't so." Rashe shifted his half sack of feed to the other hand, and came across to where Uncle Shannon was all pranced up over a rippit that never happened. "Go back to

where you said about Allardene Howard," he told the old man.

"Dena's a mighty fine girl—nice li'l girl," Uncle Shannon said, while he sat on a keg of nails to get over the shakes. "What about Dena?"

Rashe said: "Shannon Budd, you're not drunk, 'cause it's yet too early in the day; but so be you don't recall what you said about this stranger man and Dena, I'll give you over to Sheriff Joe Marks to put in jail."

"All is, I seen him up there no longer 'n' yesternoon," the old man whimpered. "Can't a man see a man anywheres seeing a girl without being threatened over it?"

Rashe dropped Uncle Shannon as worthless. "You all time seeing things," he said.

The store was getting nearabout empty, each going his way with whatever he had to carry home. Out of the shummicking and shifting Rashe Lowe said: "I had offen Virge Howard how Waits got in a ruction over to Robbins' Gap."

After he had hung around waiting for some person to ask him what that fight was, and nobody did, Rashe told out the story as Preacher Howard had given it to him. And by the time he got through, Wait-Still-on-the-Lord Lowe was far and away the beatingest man in all the world, who could wipe his feet on any man set against him.

By now there wasn't anybody heeding Rashe whatsoever, so he swung his sack up over his shoulder and started out.

Uncle Shannon, back in the store, kept on telling a

stand of brooms that a man had a right to fly or stay on earth, and, as a consequence, the right to wash, or stay comfortable—till Ranson Gillow, still unpacking things, called from inside a box of dress goods for him either to hush, or go home.

Above Cragg Hill Rashe overtook Fayre Jones, sitting upon a felled tree and looking cross-eyed.

"I just took me a swallow out of both bottles," he owned, "and my in'ards has turned blinky."

So Rashe kept him company in his sadness, and devysed out to him all about Waits's rippit, till Fayre got over his miseries and they went on together.

CHAPTER IX

In the mirk of dawn the Howard girls came out of their house and set a fire burning in the yard beneath the sugar maple. They used the bare ground caused by the maple tree for their wash-house, and it was swept clean and white as an indoor room.

It was the unevenest day that dawned. There were round, rolling clouds with the first streak of light, and a soft, wet wind came sweeping by, throwing spatters of rain around. Then the sun got up, looking as if he had never been to bed, so red-eyed and yellow-faced he was. Soon gray-tinted clouds covered his shame; then the wind brought more rain, and at last white mists were creeping about among the dark purple mountains. Yet far away, where the hills faded to a pale blue, there was a splash of bright sun.

"Regular sheepfold o' mist," Bess said, "Do you reckon we better start to wash today?"

Dena and Bess hadn't more than balanced up the boiling kettle so it wouldn't turn legs up come they put water in it, than they heard a shout from afar off, and over from Big Wolf Bald they saw Fayre Jones lick-splitting himself toward them looking as if he'd just come down off a scarey-bird pole.

"Fayre ain't ugly to look at in the face," Dena said, "but he's hung most perfectly loose together. See his legs flap!"

"You hush!" Bess spoke out for her sweetheart, "Fayre can't help the way the Lord made him. Wonder what-all makes him in such a snûd to be here; most days he just drains along the ground."

"Go fetch another rock to hold this kettle," Dena told her. "I don't care for setting here holding it, but directly it's going to be burning hot. Take your eyes offen the pretty sight of Fayre, and let's wash clothes."

"Reckon we'd best wash today? Hit's turning loury—" Bess never had a mind set for common work.

"The fire's alight a'ready; 'n' 'twon't be but a commonplace rain. Stir 'n' get that rock like I told you!"

Pretty soon came along Fayre Jones. He brought up athwart the fence.

"Lost my breath," he gasped out.

"We ain't got it," Bess answered him. "Better ask someplace else."

Fayre finished his way over the fence.

"How you?" he asked.

"Gaily, I thank you—how you?"

"Well as otherwise."

"Set 'n' rest you a spell."

"No, I'd best be going on. First work whistle's about to blow."

As he spoke these words they heard the lost spirit of the sound come haunting up the ravine, tossed by the gusts of rain-wind. Fayre carried well water till the kettle and tubs were full; then sat him down on the end of the wash-bench, his legs sprawled and his arms hung this way and that.

"When I can hear that whistle blow four miles

east," he said slowly, "it means there'll be rain before night. Or maybe it just shows the wind's from that way."

"Is that the news you was in such a swivvet to carry seeing it's halfway raining a'ready?" Bess asked him.

"Not to say *all,*" Fayre answered. "I come by to ask about how was Dena making out since Waits been gone."

"Not widowed before married, I thank you kindly." Dena's eyes gathered darkly at him over the struggling smoke of the wash fire. "And I'd as lief, when you come to see Bess, you'd say so, flat 'n' broad out, and not be thinking up other reasons."

"Well'm," Fayre said.

Once got to where he'd been hurrying to, Fayre was all in a fumble about what he was doing there. And now Dena'd got him all put out, so he'd have to start again to know where to go on. When Dena played big sister for Bess he was a mite scared of her.

"How you come on?" he asked again.

"Tolerably, I thank you; how's your ownself?" Bess answered with manners. And then she said to her sister, as if Fayre had gone away, "The poor fellow had a heap o' news in his head, when he started out running, but it shook loose like eggs out of a basket, and he's plumb empty."

"Not either," Fayre put in. "Gin you give me time to lay hold o' the rights of it, I'll drag it out. Dena here about chocked it off forever."

He ran out of words again and Dena started on the first tub of white clothes, and thought about them and

her own thoughts; and when she got so far as the stranger that came by day or two since, asking dinner, she got a cold feeling down her back and stood up straight to ease it. Seemed she had been a long time thinking inside her head; yet there still sat Fayre Jones not having said one more word.

"My gracious forgive us, Fayre Jones!" Dena cried out, "efn you don't speak out what you come a-running for, I declare this'll be the last time ever you *shall* come."

"All was I thought you'd be joyful to have some word of Waits Lowe."

Her face was uncertain, but she did not turn her eyes from him. "'Pends what kind o' word."

"Well, how come it was this, so Rashe was telling me yestermorn while I took a day off work. Seems Waits 'n' another fellow over Robbins' Gap way had a rippit at a play-party one night right after he left here, through just naturally disagreeing with one another's looks. Well-sir, enduring of the party this fellow . . ."

"What was his name?"

"Never did hear tell. Anyway, he took 'n' hid a mule-wagon team o' tie-timber Waits was hauling out for old Lum Morgan. Seems it give Waits a sight o' care and tiresomeness, and being a high-headed sort of man, he just went after him right now. Finds out where this fellow idles around 'n' lays out to get up a ruction with him. 'Twasn't no time scarcely till it growed into a jower, and it's liable to swell to a fray."

"What all started it?" Bess asked, wanting to hear more story.

"Where's it going to stop at?" Dena said, folding dowie hands in her apron, and thinking about Waits.

While Fayre was absent in mind, gathering more words, Dena saw the stranger passing yon side of her fence, and she was bound to watch him out of sight toward Glen Hazard, even though he made no sign he saw her. "Must be that red-gold hair of his that just holds my eyes on him," she told herself, and then said out loud: "Here, Bess, wring out these things 'n' set 'em to boil. Go on, Fayre, you been asked a question—where's this growing ruction going to stop at?"

"As for start," Fayre said, not hurrying; "hit never started from a thing in the world, so far as a man can learn. Hit's just one of the things that comes of a man cootering around where he's no business at. He's raised up a lavish of trouble to start his seeing the world with. And as for stop, that's something no person can see as far as. Nothing's liable to happen for a spell, because they tell now where this fellow's left those parts, and Waits has gone on his way."

"And you never heard tell this other fellow's name?"

"Seems he's not much known of around the Gap, but come in there from over beyond somewheres—Brimstone, likely—but a person can't say."

"Now you're shet of what you come for, what other news you got?" Bess asked.

"I've found me a new kind of medicine."

"News, I said. You took a habit o' dosing long ever ago; keep on and you'll in a manner spoil."

Fayre screwed his eyes up trying to think about

news, and Bess kept putting at him: "Surely to mercy there's more down in town than you 'n' your ailings?"

After a while Fayre recalled: "There's a foreigner took up in Glen Hazard; a mountain man he is, but not what you'd call a homemade boy; claims he's cousin-kin to the Morgan tribe, but he don't look poor-stock to me. They're a low set o' people, the Morgans —addled from their first egg."

Bess said: "What-all's the foreigner like—we a'ready know more than we can throw away about the Morgans."

"He's taller 'n' Waits, and so fair o' face a woman would joy to look upon him, but he's got the queerest look back of his eyes, and the meanest hands; large kind of, and twisty-like—I don't know—more like claws maybe."

Bess started to say: "Why, Dena, that's like . . ."

"Heish!" Dena told her like a slap in the face, while Fayre yet kept on: "Man told me a man seen him told him this fellow could pick up 'n' carry off a couple o' double bags o' feed; but don't look to me like his spindling arms would. Likely that's just a tale."

Fayre gathered himself together and eased his length upright, and stretched until he looked seven feet or such a matter tall. "I started to get to Glen Hazard. The last whistle'll blow now afore I've rightly time to check in. Reckon I'd best dander along." And he took himself away, all unwilling.

The fire was half dead under the big kettle, the clothes had stopped boiling, the water was steaming lazily all unhelpful for the affairs of wash-day.

Bess sat her down upon the chopping-log near the pile of firewood. Her arms and her feet were bare, and her wool dress blouse was turned in at the neck, showing her pretty white throat. Her big, dark-blue eyes were stuck fast upon nothing, at the place where Fayre had gone over the hill; and all she wanted on this earth was that it wouldn't be wash-day.

Dena stood leaning on the clothes-paddle over against the bench, and she was silent, too, for she had set her mind to have done with useless fretting. She had already tried to forget about Waits, and to go about her affairs neglectful of such a person. And now what about this ruction he'd gotten into? Seems it wasn't enough for him to go kurling off, but he had to right away send back unwholesome news. So she lingered in a betweenwhiles, scarcely noticing the tasks of everyday.

CHAPTER X

After the jower, when he had stood up to the fellow and shamed him when he bragged before the townsmen of Robbins' Gap, Waits was in a swivvet to be gone on further ventures. But his ownself was not slightly torn up, so he was willing to lay up at Preacher Howard's, over above Clear Fork, and cool off in the same skin he got hot in. Thereafter he set forward, great-hearted and ready to turn the world around, for truly this man had been taller than himself by two inches or better, longer of arm, and red-headed besides.

In the woods was little worry and less fret, and he could cosset his temper back to where it was—he thinking all the time he was full of hate and ill will, while he was only prideful and contented. However the mind be set, the trees and birds are good cure for one that has overly mixed with men, and wildflowers not to be despised.

Waits had bought bacon and crackers and beans from a store at road's crossing, and he cooked his food over a twig fire, and drank of the freestone water in a hillside spring. "Taking all with everything," he told a flicker that sat upon a bush beyond his fire, "I do equal to Elijah's ravens, or some better."

Studying upon the quarrel at the play-party, he would rest for hour upon hour on the side of a cool-

running branch that fed into Clear Fork, while the sun shot arrows through the tangled trees.

This man at the Gap had held himself high-headed and cool and easy, but he had the meanest-looking hands ever were seen upon a well-favored young fellow. A queer shape they were to start with, and gnarled like an old man's, yet without any workstain to honor them. Waits thought it was more than likely, now he came to think back, that herein lay the cause of his share in the upscuddle—that, and maybe a look the man had, saying with every smooth muscle: "Touch me gin ye dare!"

It surprised Waits how such a fuss could have grown out of a hat. Didn't seem in reason a hat was cause enough for all that had taken place. Couldn't have been just a hat. He now took off the same hat and rubbed it smooth on his coat sleeve and held it up in front of him on his fist. "Just see what you done!" he quarreled at it, and then laughed master and threw it down.

Waits went back over the affair. "I might maybe have been too serious with the big hateful. There he was, laying on the ground, and men come around speaking solemn, and holding his head tender-like, and talking about where was sheriff. So I perfectly walked off while they's yet talking. It ain't in any manner a easy walk out yon side Robbins' Gap, but sheriff in the air will make a man walk glib. Surely it is funny how you take a distaste to some folks!" Waits ended up, satisfied.

But all thoughts are pleasant in the year's new coming, and while Waits yet felt of his bruises to see how they were coming on, and looked at the clean pink scars where his knuckles had healed up, he was forgetting all his mad and letting it get away from him.

"You're an ear-kissing sound," he said to the water-branch; "first thing in the world ever to sing!"

The sun fell low and low, till all space was drawn out and stretched away, and when the yellow from the sun was gone, it burned rich red and was quenched in the westward hills.

Thus went the days, but when the skies darkened, and the hills stood black and fearsome, Waits craved his humankind, and would stand upon a jutting rock and search the tree-thick slopes for the far light of a homestead.

Down near a waterfall, two great cliffs stood out, and through this giant gate Waits could see far mountains, a stretch of tilted farmsteads hitherward of them, with fields brown and red and yellow and some just coming green, and all looking like maybe a corner of a patchwork quilt. The wind blew strongly all the day, and went away with the going down of the sun. Tonight there was a light on the hitherward side the mountain where he stood. It might maybe be a mile, or two or three, from this place, but Waits thought it a chancey place to spend the night and turned from his rock to seek a path. This being found, he started down, and for very fullness of life began to sing:

"There was a man of ancient times,
The Scripture does inform us,
Whose pomp and grandness and whose crimes
Was great and was enormous.
This rich man had three meals a day,
And dressed in purple linen,
He sat 'n' drank but scorned to pray
And spent his time in sinning.

Now a poor man lay at the rich man's gate
To help himself unable,
And there he lay to humbly wait
For the crumbs from the rich man's table.
Not one crumb would that happy cure[1]
Ever aye pretend to send him,
But the dogs took pity and licked his sores,
They was ready to befriend him.

And the poor man died at the rich man's gate
Where angel bands attended;
Straightway to Abraham's bosom flown
Where all his sorrows ended.
This rich man died (and was buried, too)
But, O, his dreadful station!
With Abr'am and Lazarus both in view
He landed in damnation!"

Night was fully come ere Waits called out at the house in the clearing. The dogs set up a great noise, till the man of the house came out and hushed them. He stood in his doorway and waited for the name and wherefrom. This given, he told his own name of John Bruton.

"How about me spending the night at your house?" Waits asked.

[1] epicure

"That's as pleases you," Bruton answered him. "You're right welcome, gin you can stand what we can offer."

When Waits had gone through the door he had to look about for a place to put himself, for the house had but one room and a slaunchways lean at back, and everything was full up of children. Also, as if a person did not know where to step already, three of the dogs came back withindoors.

A woman was sitting in a low chair near to the fire, cradling the least child to sleep, while she had a story a-telling to the other ones. Twin boys, so little they could not walk save by holding each other's hands, were journeying along the far wall, their heads looking like curly yellow flowers in the shadows beyond the firelight. A tall girl and boy sat on the edge of the big bed, and three lesser children were upon the floor at their feet watching the mother by the fire. And the mother looked into the fire from whence she seemed to be drawing, with her wide eyes, the story she was telling the children.

She stopped speaking when her man came in with Waits, until she should hear what was to do. The man told his wife: "A neighbor from the hinder mountains come along, and I couldn't spare for him to pass by since dark was come, so I've bid him stay the night."

While he was saying this, the hounds and the middling children fell to a play-game, and used up the little bit of floor there was. And from the heart of the noise the woman said: "Where at's he going to lay down?"

"He can make out to lay alongside me and a couple of boys; and you can get along in Nelsie's bed with some others. The balance . . ." He stopped to count up, and while he was doing it, slapped dogs and children alike back to where they belonged. "The balance," he puzzled when he was through, "will just have to make out."

"I'd best go on," Waits offered; but such a thing as breaking welcome, after being taken in, was outside all manners.

"We'll make to enjoy you as best we can; but we live poor this time o' year," the woman said.

"Sooner fare hard with good folk than feast with bad," Waits made his thanks.

"Take up the story you had a-telling the children, mother," the man said, "the while Mist' Lowe gets to feel at home. Pick you a chair and you fancy it," he said to Waits, "and draw up to the fire. Use all in house like your own."

Waits found an empty cracker box, which was the nearest chair he saw in the room, and set it close to the fire. Then he took time to notice his host. He was dressed like common, in rough, clean overall clothes, and he wore a soft black hat all the time, indoors as much as out. He had a long and ample beard coming nearly to his belt. His eyes looked out sharply from beneath heavy brows, and though full of light there was a dark shadow somewhere about them. He looked like a man good tempered so long as not crossed, and then mean enough to make the Devil envy.

The twins had won around the wall and back and

stood staring Waits up and down till he got him settled. Then they came with one accord and sat upon the floor, leaning against his feet.

The woman finished the telling: ". . . and she ran fast, fast, back to her mother, so the wolves never got her at all."

One of the children spoke for the first time since Waits came in: "Is that a truly true story?"

"Would 'a' been," the mother-woman told the children in a solemn way. "Come mighty near being a truly true story that time—only one of the wolves, the one that had the biggest, whitest teeth, come and *ate that story up*. Now you go lay down somewheres, and grow while you sleep—go 'long now!"

"Don't you aim to tell us that one about . . ."

"You hear me! Now go on. You can pick you a quilt, and see you lay down where a person'll not fall over you come they takes a step in the dark."

The twins had already gone asleep, leaning upon Waits, and he said leave them, since they did not hamper him; but the mother-woman laid down the least child from her arms and spread the twins beside it on the bed.

When she got up Waits saw that her thin figure was crippled and she walked nearly bent in two, so her tattered clothes hung queerly on her; but her head might have belonged to a fine lady—it was delicate and careful, and the big brown eyes, set far within the shadowed curve of her brows, were fit to see a lot more than most folk would see in wider walls. Her heavy hair was coiled upon her head and held there with a

great, two-pronged pin topped with a green glass stone. And when the story was in the telling, she had nodded her head and given it a little shake so the stone glittered, and her hair had slid down her neck, and she had made a funny little twist with her mouth, and did her hair up again while she was yet talking.

Waits puzzled how she could be so penned at home, yet withal widen the way for her children with her seeing eyes and gentle voice and stories a-telling.

When the children were laid down, she came back to her chair by the fireside, and watched for him to start saying his business, for it is outside all manners to ask.

Talking to Bruton, yet answering the wife's hungry eyes, Waits told them: "I'm just a go-about person, straggling through the country. I'm going far 'n' beyond to content my mind with the how and why of folks living."

"And you endure so far as the settlements, what look you to find there?" the mother-woman asked him, and Bruton frowned upon her.

He asked pardon for her of Waits, saying: "She's that enquiring she'd turn a rainbow arch over, to see was it brighter t'other side. Forgive her."

"There is nothing," Waits said. "All I aim, ma'am, is to see with my own eyes some of the things of this world outside my own homegrown mountains, like a city and maybe the ocean-sea. Another thing I'm eager to go for is books. Man like me needs book-learning."

"Book-learning is a dangerous thing," Bruton said.

"Put on n'er faggot, Martha, so we can get a light on this."

While she did this, Waits noticed her hands to be delicate as her face, and marveled how such a thing could be in this poor home. And he thought: "She must have been full of grace at the start to have come so white and soft-handed out of hard work, let alone eight childrens."

He answered Bruton: "Because I can live free of book-learning is no reason I don't crave it." He turned so as not to seem staring at the man's wife.

Bruton leaned his bulging body back against the wall and stretched his legs stiff to the fire's blaze. His face was loosely put together, so it was easy to knit up into anger, or fall into lust. Waits wondered him if ever he whipped his crippled wife. She looked hunted-like. But the man was such that she was safe enough before strangers.

"Book-learning is no more than getting your head all swarved up with other folks' notions. They write 'em down to get shet of 'em; but likely as not, time the book's in your hand, and you've taken the weight of it into your own head, they've changed their minds, and keep thinking fresh thoughts, while you sop up their old ones. Put on n'er faggot, Martha."

When Waits had got this saying by heart, he said: "Hit don't harm me to know their dead thoughts."

"What you want with other men's dead thoughts, when you might be using your headpiece to have live ones of your own?"

Bruton got up to turn the hounds out, and the last-left one he helped with a kick. The woman started to say a word to him, but he looked at her and she stopped. "Don't you fret what I may do to a dog," he told her when he had sat down again. "You and the childrens just much them till first news they'll be speaking out and asking to sleep in our bed. Which makes me think, you may as well go ben 'n' lay down, and Mist' Lowe can have your chair. Bring in more faggots first, against we want to set up."

After she had gone to lay her down, having first carried the wood, Waits said:

"Some thoughts never die. And maybe there are big thoughts in books I'd never edzact outen my own head."

Above an hour they sat, and burned more faggots, and when the last had fallen in two parts, Bruton said:

"Likely there's more thoughts than you'd meet in a day-long run, but no head could hold all of 'em, so why muck with any? You'll only torment yourself with notions you can't find an end to."

But for all the man's words, it was the mother-woman's hungry eyes while she had the story a-telling to the young-uns, that best agreed with Waits's own mind. And while he argued back and forth with Bruton, it was her quarrel, and he was in some sort trying to win out for her. And he had the thought to maybe bring her back a book for herself from where he found them, but more than likely her man would burn it to see her weep.

Bruton said: "I reckon we'd as well lay us down gin you feel sib to sleep. Thinking is a wilderness, take it how you may—easy to get into, but it's a strange and unusual man that finds his way out."

CHAPTER XI

WAITS took his leave of John Bruton at mornglôm of the next day following, and Bruton begged him to stay the rest of that year, or anyway till corn be laid by.

"Yours is a fair resting-place, full of summer sights and sounds," Waits made gentle answer, "but I'm bound to win outland."

So he went forward and for the next while stayed both night and day upon the hills, sleeping where some day's march had chanced him and going steadfastly on when morning dawned.

Times he lay in a shady forest patch in the heart of the day, while his eyes looked up the far hills, framed as a picture by the near tree boles and the arched branches. Then, slowly and with purpose, he would build up a life for himself—he would, in his head, return to his home place, and marry and beget children, and work steadfastly through the years at some trade he could get a hand's-grip upon. He would be the head-leader of a settlement, or maybe a lone judge, like Preacher Howard, and . . . Here the falling of a twig from the branch above him, or the sharp call of a bird far in the woods, would make him jump to his feet, twitching to be gone again. And he would fling down his solemn thoughts to lie where he had thought them. Blithely he would go on, but: "I am

torn and greatly troubled," he said, "by there being two of me!"

Then a wet spell of weather overtook him, and for the most part of a week the rain came down master. It was near solid to walk through, and Waits wondered where he should betake his squelching self till the sky should dry out. He sought a homestead, where he might shelter from the onding, and the first he came to was as crowded as Bruton's, but the people there told him of a lone man who haunted the next ridge crest, and there Waits made harbor with one who dwelt lonely because of his hatred of mankind.

And there, behind the sound of heavy rainfall, Waits learned a new thing—that hate can eat both heart and mind till there seems nothing fitten left on earth. Yet the man was gracious to him and shared food and shelter as well as much talk.

But it was distasteful to Waits to hear nothing save evil of the fine-pretty world and its humankind, and he said to himself: "As soon be drowned in the rain as hated to death; it be-nasties a man's mind." So he made his thanks to his host for shelter, and gave him most all the money he had left of Sam Ewart's last pay, and gladly was gone from there, and walked into the rain.

The rain driveled to a smirr, for nature favors those that face her out boldly, so that by eveglôm the rain quit and a white cloud sat down upon the mountain as if it had come to stay all summer. But after an hour or more a little wind from the south came and pushed it on, so gently a person would scarcely know it was moving. Piece after piece the woods came clear, and all

the whiteness in the world rolled up and started to get up into the sky before it got dark.

Looking westerwards, where the sun could scarcely find room to go down amongst so much trash of clouds, Waits said: "Sun's got plenty pillows to his head this night! Wonder where-at I'll dry me? This wet's about to eat into my bones."

While he was yet talking, he gathered twigs and leaves, dry from beneath rock overhangs, and with a good heart builded him a fire. He stripped off his clothes and dried them, and dried his white body with his shirt (which was not made ready for church-meeting thereby) and dressed again; and he cooked bacon and ate it with some cold bread the lone man had given him that morning.

Then he went on, and chanced upon an empty church house, where he lay for the night. And now the moon was great and golden upon world's edge, but Waits could see through the window where she was prisoned behind bars of clouds, and when she got back of one of these, the world was bereft. The cloud was all gold-edged and lighted up, and when the moon came out again, the earth gladdened, but the cloud got sulky-sullen.

And next thing Waits knew, the dawn wind was blowing, and the first gray of morning light was in the sky.

He cooked him more bacon and ate the last of the bread, and looked long at the last piece of money held in his hand—but twenty-five cents. Then he put it in his pocket and went forward gaily.

Soon thereafter he stood upon an overthrust rock, and listened to the noises coming up from the lower farms—separate and clear and sharp in the air so newly rain-washed. There was the slow bock, bock of an axe on a dead tree, the wowl of a forsaken dog, the scattered sound—cherplack, cherplack, cherplack—of hammering on some house a-building in the lowlands; the quick rat-tattle of an empty wagon setting forth with eager horses to the fields, and where he saw a man go in at a farm gate, soon there came the barking of the house dogs; and all this while, close to his hand, a chipmunk chip-chip-chipped; and the rich smell of steaming fields made him toss his head like a colt and cry out for very gladness.

He followed a single track through the scrub until he came again upon the walkable way, and there he met a man—just a common man with a sack of meal on his shoulder and a bucket of lard swinging by its bail from his hand.

"Sunshine!" Waits greeted.

"Fine sun!" the man made ready answer.

"Sun a-shining—sun a-shining!" together they chanted, and each went whistling on his way.

But a cloud came before the sun, and cast a shadow over the hitherward hills, and Waits's spirit darkened and his gladness shrank away till he was at odds with himself and no longer knew the soft earth that pushed his feet forward. He could find no meaning to his own-self, or to life whatever, and in the midst of his mazed thoughts came, fittingly with the overcasting of the day, the notion to kill himself. And here he was, a

common mountain boy, homemade in the hinder hill country, with no wealth or learning, and no gift whatsoever with hands or head. The thought to kill himself was not in anger or fear. It came naturally as maybe another flower of the woodland that he might gather to see if it would be harmless or poison. Only, when he took it, it would be too late to draw back. No matter—there would be nothing!

So he made his way along the spur, working to the edge, the back of his mind looking sharply for an overthrust, or maybe a steep, where he might fall sheer down. And the cloud was yet lingering over the sun.

Within a mile he came to such a place, and stood looking down—his body balanced with the sureness of the mountain-born, one foot upon the edge, the other half over. Then he lifted up his eyes to the far-stretching ridge of hills, and smelled the smell of the forest and heard the myriad noises of the woods in one low hum of life that was his world. As he held his eyes upon the far-off hills, words came to him: "Even so far as a man sees into the haze afar off over the crests of the purple hills, even so far do I see into mine own heart." And he wondered at the singing words that came from the three old books in the room at home, and looked long at them to see what they might mean.

The cloud passed from across the sun. He remembered that he was going in search of many books that had singing words, and his thought of casting himself down slipped away so softly in the sunlit air that he never missed it. And he who could read the woods like

a book, walked blindfold through them, longing for printed pages.

All this thinking had made him hollow as a gun-barrel, and his feet took him to where his ears heard noise of chopping—for there would be men, and, as a consequence more than likely, food. He came on them all of a suddenty, and stood in the hitherward laurel scrub watching, wary as a wildcat, while they in the sunlit patch in the hollow below wrought at their tree-felling. The woodcutters numbered three men, so far as Waits could then see, and all looked to him harmless, simple, like common.

He saw them tackle the tree so it would fall slaunchways betwixt those standing, injuring none and coming evenly toward earth as of its own will. These men shamed Waits's useless arms and legs, and drove all the notions of his head into a far corner.

He noticed the men did not talk to one another unless something needed saying, and then all their words were helpful to getting the work done. And Waits, while yet thinking where might be the dinner buckets, kept his eyes on the swing of the smooth-muscled arms. "They got a natural-born fellowly feeling for their work tools," he thought. "Come to chop a tree, they leave the axe bite the wood the way it wants; come to roll a log and they know which way its going to stir and where best to shove it."

The swinging of their arms in the sunlight and the rocking of their bodies around the tree was like a magic dance, for the tree came down easy-like, just in the selfsame spot they had marked for it to fall, with

never a tie-hold or pull-rope to guide it. They just naturally beavered it down; and the stump stood yellowy-white.

And now they looked at their work—each man walking the length to see how much of a tree they had felled; and they saw that it was good, and found their dinner buckets hanging on a sweetberry bush, and sat them down to eat. And on the clink there hopped out of the far thicket a pair of boys, some eight years old or such a matter, and as like as if each were the other. They stood long-eared and pop-eyed, with yellow hair bushing out all ways, and at the low end of their blue overalls were four dirty bare feet.

"What looking things," the youngest man said from around the bread he was biting, "and mine—God pity me for my sins! How come you way out here? Jump back in the briar patch you just come out of—you hear me!—outen yourself!" And while Waits yet stared they were gone like a conjure.

Never could he have set his mind to go down and talk with the woodcutters, if it had not been for the way they were wading through the dinner buckets. If there were to be any leftments for him to buy with his lone quarter, he would have to step down and attend to affairs. So he brogued down into the clearing, with swinging step, like as if he had just come and had seen them unforetold; and he stopped before them and pulled out his money and said: "How about me buying your leftments to stay me?"

The oldest man gathered the three buckets together and one by one turned them over and knocked out the

crumbs. Then he looked up at Waits, saying: "Gin you'd come a mite sooner there'd have been more worth paying for. As 'tis, you're welcome to what is—free!"

Waits put a sad hand on his stomach as if he might be feeling for his backbone, and he said: "Reckon you don't want ary hand to help fall trees?"

After the man had looked him over, he answered: "Where'd be the sense of me hiring a boy so hungry he'd not be able to heft a axe? Go on a piece toward sunset till you come to our camp and tell the women I said give you dinner. Gin you get through, come on back. I might maybe could use two more arms a day or maybe two."

So Waitstill stayed with the woodcutters, and went out with them at dawn taking out timber. He learned what trees to take and what to spare, and how to lay his ear against the bole and hark for a windshake. And at night he came with them into their camp and ate of the good food, and listened to talk, and heard the women lament that ever they had wed go-about persons. And the twin boys, Bob and Bill, took great joy in Waits. They laughed at his odd-fashioned name, and pestered him distract' for stories, when all sat around after supper, waiting for night to cool the day.

In this manner full summer came, the big-hearted time of year, when earth yields up all it has in a sun-offering. The leaves were broad-shining upon the tall trees, fields were full of brave corn, and hedges ran wild with blackberry and maythorn and bryony,

while in sun-caught fields on south slopes, wildflowers stretched up, bright as a new-lit flame.

Waits told the boys all the stories he knew, and some he made up. The men and women harkened, too, and all said that Waits Lowe was pleasant, and a helping man and must likely have been fetched up fairly by a useful mother-woman. And upon a night loury with breeding thunder, the boys were in a mighty taking for a story, but Waits claimed his head was wede from the dry spell. Yet they could not content themselves, and cried out to tell a cold one—the coldest telling in the world, to cool the night.

"Such bearm I never see!" Waits quarreled at them. "Come a little more shifting this way and that and you'll set yourself afire. Go set down and I'll see can I call up enough words to serve for a story." And the story he told them was:

THE THREE LOST DAYS

One time, February loaned March three days, and March pushed on into April, taking along a whole big load of snow and cold winds. "I got no need of these," April said; so she pushed them on into May, and it kept on being spring three days after summer-time ought to have turned. And every month's end was handed on to the next one, till the weather was so outlandish mixed up that folks like to not got ary crop, and the fuss they set up was a scandal.

Well, it come around to January once more, and January said: "Looks like somebody's got to be head o' this house and say what's to do! Keep on like this and folk'll get so they won't know what time o' day it is."

So January that year raised the most survigrous blizzard that ever happened. Hit started in at midnight on the thirty-second day of January, and it snowed a sight in the world.

Hit come quiet-like to start with, but it kept on till all the valleys was filled level with the tops of the mountains, like a million acres of cloth-by-the-yard. Then all the wind was fetched from every country in the world and turned loose on the snow and everything went a-whirling. Great Jimminies!—you should 'a' been there to see it whirl! Hit was a master sight o' snow. And it whirled clean on down valley beyond where eye could follow—and the three days got blown perfectly away, and nobody's ever seen 'em since.

THUS the days were full of work, and at nights were stories a-telling. And some nights the middling man of the three brought out his fiddle. He could fairly conjure with it, and the need to cradle it his ownself nearly burnt Waits up. But as soon almost ask a man for his wife as his fiddle, and Waits hung back.

One night, when the man had been making it sing like a leaf-storm in fall, Waits said, from out of his shadow by the tent: "Surely undoubtedly I got to learn me that!"

"Didn't you ever yet hold a fiddle?" the man asked.

"Not to say to draw much from it. I can make out to pick a tune, o' course, but I can't anyways make melody the way you do that sets a man's head and heels both afire."

And Waits came out of his shadow, hopeful, but the man wrapped up his fiddle and put it away.

Now Waits was taken with the strong notion to get a fiddle for his ownself. "Gin I had me a fiddle," he said, "I'd evermore give up going outland, but I'd take that fiddle, and I'd play that fiddle perfectly point-blank back to where Allardene Howard would be waiting!"

CHAPTER XII

For Dena Howard the days went by without meaning a thing whatever. She ploughed and planted, and tended house, and tried to keep her heart sweet toward Bess, who was so wild in the head these times owing to Fayre Jones that she could scarce be got to feed the chickens and wash dishes.

And every while, or such a matter, that man Bracy would go by the place—not that he was any consequence, but he had got in the way of asking this and that, and of lingering a while over the fence before he would move on. Already she had grown used to him, so she wondered over him days he stayed away.

On a day when the sun was late up, Dena started to get to the Bald, where her young heifer had strayed and she was bound to go fetch it in. She left Bess to mind Homer and to get dinner ready, and told the old man he was not to try reaching for things he could not get, and so fall out of his chair, but to call Bess.

When the sun came out of its blankets, it grew strong and clear, and took in at one long sup all the little mist clouds that were flocking among the hills—made a perfect meal off them. Dena took the path down by Neverfail Creek, and when she had crossed by the foot-log, began slowly to climb the easy slope.

Big Wolf Bald was no more than a few hundred

acres of bare mountain top—bare of tree life, but a joyful place for wildflowers, and growing a reedy wild grass and clumps of huckleberry bush and shrubs. There were ledges of outcrop rock holding back the waves of earth that tried to wash down the slopes. And under the rocks Dena found her a writing-spider to tell her fortune, and some change-coat lizards. Telling fortunes brought her to think upon Waitstill Lowe, and, for that she wished not to think of him, she called the heifer with soft long calls that carried over and beyond. While she was yet climbing, the rocks gave back echoes, but when she got to the topmost height the echoes stopped. She could not have told why, but quickly she gave over calling, for under the skin of her back neck, where a person mostly gets scared, there was that creepy, drawing feeling that says—"Watch out!" and "Hush!"

But surely certainly there was something moving way down by the creek—a person thing. At first she thought maybe Bess was climbing after her to ask some fool question like "what's for dinner since the beans give out"; but Bess would be dressed in light-colored clothes. Then she saw that this was a man-person. Whoever he was, he went on up the creek and Dena drew the long breath of one let out of an uncertain dream.

She had taken a sight of pains with that heifer, and left it suck a mort too long for common usings. Then, soon as weaned, it took a habit of lone wandering, like she had nothing to do all her days but watch after it. Like Waits! Perfectly a picture of Waits—and him

most likely planning that she would walk after him. Well, maybe yes! Maybe no!

Now she'd come so far as thinking of Waits again, she recalled every look on his face, and woman-fashion she liked best the look he had when he forgot both her and himself, lost in the big thought that he himself could not take in. It was not what a person could call a useful look, but it made you feel the way big spaces do —not a mite of use for farming on, but how would a person get on without them?

She moved on through the morning, and all of her cried out for him, till it brought such longing to see him that she was ashamed and had to drag her mind away.

In among the bushes and briars were little clearings, running in and out and leading right to the rock's edge in some places. When a cow-beast strayed off in these parts, it would eat and graze through the leafy scrub from one clearing to another so it was the durndest thing to find. When it was among the bushes a person could hear it but not see it, and when it came into a clearing the rustling noise would stop and then a person didn't know where to look.

Directly Dena sat down to rest herself, and began again to study out how such a one as Waits, with thoughts about stars and words and the goodness of earth, was all the time falling athwart some one or other of his fellow-men. There must have been somewhat betwixt him and this Robbins' Gap man. Yet what kind of somewhat could it have been with a stranger-person?

"I hope," Dena said out loud, as she got to her feet, "I hope that man from the Gap starts out to get some place one dark night and plumb falls offen the mountain, and goes to see his Black Daddy. I hope so."

She came near to stamping on a violet flower when she said this, and went down upon her knees to smooth the grass around it. "I'd properly ought to be 'shamed," she told herself, "acting like a child o' Satan right here in the sight of the Lord's fine-pretty things!" She dug up a root of yellow violets, and a butterfly weed for her garden, and thought about the poverty grass. "No," she made up her mind, "you're mighty pretty, but you'd eat out all else come I got you good 'n' rooted. You stay here and run free, where you make the Lord's world a sight to see and don't do a mite o' harm.

" 'Tain't fitten that I should be smit with the sulks this time o' year," she said while she folded the violet plant in her handkerchief, "for surely the love of flower-things is the Lord's gift. Their colors and their sweetness make a person think about patience and happy days—and a pity it would be in one who lives beside them not to have the heart fair also!"

She had nearabout let the heifer get out of her mind, and might have gone on by it, for all she or it cared, but she heard a rustling down in the scrub and parting a way through came to where the beast was, and it appeared content to break a leg any minute from the way it stood near the edge of a tall rock. Dena dared not chase it for fear it might start over, and

the heifer did not pay any heed whatever to her call—so there they both were.

All her thoughts this day were just a noise to press back the empty space within her. She was fearful of not having anything in mind, lest the loneliness overcome her, so she made her head keep on spinning thoughts just as she had made her hands hold the needle to sew Bess's clothes, when they were tinsey girls. She recalled those days, after their mother had died, and she her ownself but fourteen, with Bess turning nine and no manner of help around the place. Homer was courting a second time to get him a good wife and a home-keeper for his children, when he took and fell off the church-house roof then a-building, and ruined himself forevermore. After that the days had just rolled on, with neighbors coming over to help with heavy tasks, or when any of them took a sickness. The Bart brothers, before they got too old, had done a heap for Homer, and would not take so much as an ear of corn on shares. Each would say, when he put at them about it, "We're satisfied to take it out in quar'ling." And they would sit with Homer hours long and quarrel a sight on earth over everything that had a name. Rashe and Barsha Lowe had done the Howards much goodwill, and that was how it came to pass Waits had taken the habit of courting Dena, they being in a manner raised up together.

Everything she made herself think about ended up with Waits. She lay down on the grass in the warm sun, while the soft winds blew over her, and she tried not thinking—just feeling the day. But feeling was worse.

Some girls might have been soothed just lying there, but Dena was not made to lie around. Furthermore, the grass was wet with the morning's early showers, and she would be liable to take sick. "I come cow-hunting," she told herself, "and use up a perfect hour acting dauncy."

Waiting on the heifer to graze itself up the slope from the ledge, she wandered on to where the limestone slabs ended, and cedar scrub grew scantily among the gravelty bits. "Anyway," she ended up, "I'll not be a lone and worthless woman yet. There's a far piece to go in this world—be he come back or not. There's planting and harvest, and cows to milk, and food to cook, and clothes to make—and a heap o' people other than Waitstill Lowe. He might maybe have lighted the fire in my heart, but I can keep it burning to warm other folk with—efn it don't set my ownself ablaze first!"

And now she came handily upon the heifer—time, too, with the sun turned so far on its down journey—and she slipped below the cow-beast and shoved it up the slope easy-like.

Dena and the heifer were both still now, and yet there was a sound of rustling in the scrub, and—unknowen why—Dena was afeared and turned the heifer toward home, urging it fast, while it shambled over the loose earth, puzzled, and flinging its head and wailing lornly.

But haste was no matter, for out from the bushes came only Burl Bracy, and soon as she laid eyes on him, Dena wondered her what was to be scared of,

seeing it was but the go-about person that had taken up in Glen Hazard. She kept her path, and nodded "How d'ye" to him as he came toward her, thinking no more than that he was short-cutting a piece to Sunview, which lay back yonderways.

Then she felt him close back of her, and his shadow fell beside hers at her right hand, so that she started away from the man, for he had trodden softly, and was overly near. He came evenly to her side, and, when her eyes threatened him, a smile of sureness slipped from his face, and he put on a mild look for her to see.

"Seems you might 'ware a person, and not just slip up that way," she said—but not mad with him, for he held himself easy and was pleasant to look upon. The sunlight flamed on his soft, thick hair, and was sib to his tawny eyes; furthermore, no woman can hold anger against a man who has a fine wide head, and a big laugh, and an air around him as if he could pick up life and walk off with it.

So many weeks now she had been haunted by him, that it satisfied her to have him fronting her at last like any homemade boy. She might maybe edzact what it was uneasied her, now she could face him out. The first thing that came clear was that he did not have as much inside his head as out. Seemed he looked on her like any pick-up girl he might have for the asking, since he said: "Reckon we're well acquaint' by this time." And, she unanswering, he kept on: "Took me a powerful liking toward you since that day back in spring first ever I seen you."

And it was a strange thing that when Bracy talked, she kept on thinking upon Waits. She was out of friends with Waits already, but she took a worse distaste to him now for the reason that he had gone kurling off, leaving her to the pleasure of any go-about that took the notion to pester her.

"Time you 'n' me were cûd, ain't it?" Bracy pleaded, soft-voiced.

"You'd properly ought to 'ware a person," she said again. "Go 'long now—get! You hear me!"—and all this last was said to the cow-beast, and Bracy took no heed of it.

"The fairness of you all-in-all is fere 'n' fellowly," he said.

Now she had fear of him, for the sound of his sliding voice—and she hastened her steps. But he kept near.

"I treddaned many a day over it, and, thinks I, soon or late, as well tell her. She's a lone woman and not bounden. . . ."

Dena's head went wild with Waits—to go off so this worthless was free to speak of her as lone! For all Waits cared she could take her pick of another—and why not, the notion came raging through her mind, while her eyes took in Bracy—why not this stranger, so proud and easy-looking? It would no more than serve Waits proper if it should so happen.

Bracy took the flash in her darkened eyes for himself, and knew it was take or lose; words were too late.

He stepped in front of her, so that she had to stop

and look full upon him, and the look that passed between them held her eyes prisoner.

"You've no call to uneasy yourself," he said; but he drew her to him with his eyes, till she was standing close and looking up at him, her face still and set like one walking in sleep.

His arms went around her and he bent to kiss her lips, and the flower-things she carried were crushed between them. But with the first touch of his hand she had shrunk together, black afraid. His queer, tight, hands clutched her like a hank of old bale wire. She twisted to get free of the clawing hold. She tore at one of the steel hands and bent back the little finger till he yelled and let out a queer curse, and let her go free.

While he nursed the pain of it, she ran down the slope, not looking back, yet feeling his sulky eyes watching, as if he might even now spring before she could get out of distance from his claws. Fearful, she went on, tumbling and sliding on the gravelty way, till she won to the next ledge, where the scrub hid her from sight, and she knew that for this day he would let be.

It was near to sundown, and the sun already seemed sleepy and willing to go. The sky was smooth with a peaceful evening light, and the cow-beast after long enough time had gotten the habit of going on and needed no urging, else it might have stayed on the Bald forever.

"All the Morgan tribe's slippery 'n' crouchy," Dena choked, "but they naturally looks that way—where

this one, so pretty of face and proud of body, is the slinkenest and crouchingest of 'em all!"

At the open patch in the lower trees, she leaned against a tree to recall her breath, and see if she might get a hand's-grip on herself before going home. She looked down upon her home-place, close-built and low, growing from the soil as naturally as it might have been a tree—the outside buildings like small shoots growing up from the roots of the house. The old, knotted-up apple trees wrapped the house around safe, and—beyond the circling fields—the forest timber guarded all from the outside. "Our home-place got roots," Dena said; "maybe that's why I don't feel wild-wandery like Waits." (How came Waits back in her head with Bracy filling so much space?) "But seems like his home-place would have took root by this time—been setting since long ever ago when his grandsir's grandsir raised it."

She went on down the last of the mountainside, with the cow going straight and solemnly before her, and so came into the drumly path down to the foot-log bridge.

"Likely it's his mother's blood boiling in him," she said. "She used to be a trivvet in her lesser days, they tell." But Barsha Lowe was sound and heartsome, in spite of all, and Dena had this night great need of a mother-woman, where she might shelter, if need came, from such as Burl Bracy. "I aim to go over and visit with her," Dena ended up.

The cow-beast splashed into the branch, while Dena

crossed the foot-log and came, on the other side, to the ravelty path through the laurel by the edge of Never-fail Creek, and thereafter to the home-place farm.

"WHAT kind o' hants *you* been seeing?" Bess asked her. "You look white and wrung out as a towel on wash-day."

"Go pick beans!" Dena snapped at her, "and while you're at it, fetch me a milk bucket down to the barn."

There was not more than a smear of sunset. "Funny how some days the sun will go down rampaging, and other days will just wither like a spent flower," Dena thought.

When she had come in from putting up the heifer and milking the old cow, Dena slumped down at table to supper as if it was her last meal on earth; and she looked so grum and darkly that Bess, for a surprise, hushed up and did not dare put at her for news. Homer had his food carried to him in the forward room and couldn't notice her.

It was a lonesome night, and they laid them down early, the sooner to get shet of a useless day. Dena had been out idling after the heifer, and Bess—like common when left to her lonely—had not done a thing save fuss around and get Homer in a fret. But the inside of Dena's head was all torn up and scattered.

"Some say sorrow is cured by sleep," she thought, while she pulled off her clothes. "But what I say is, sleep runs to meet the next day and all's to do over again." Out loud she said: "Believe I'll set me up a

spell and cosset the fire." She buttoned up her nightgown, and brushed her hair sharply and quickly, inside-out, forward and back, and threw down the brush with a great noise when it came to her what was the use of keeping a person's hair slick just so a person would be pestered by such as Bracy? She started back into the forward room, when Bess, that knew nothing of sorrow, sang a little song, while she set her shoes carefully on the floor:

> "Wishing my true love to see,
> I put my shoes in the shape of a T."

And Dena stopped to say, "Why shame *on* you, Elizabeth Howard!"

"What about it? I been seeing you throw salt on the fire, mornings over a week."

"You never!" Dena started, but recalling that lying was anyway as bad as witching, she said: "Leastways, I never said the rhyme." And she pulled her chair to the fire and leaned her white face on her hand and looked most gone asleep already; so she didn't anymore answer Bess, who kept talking just as well without.

Bess's voice came in shreds from the other room. "Hit lacks but a couple of days to be the nine mornings you got to put salt on the fire. I don't see harm in it. 'Taint like we called up witches when the Bible says not. Anyways, it's liable not to work on Waits whatever." Directly her voice came again: "Why and all don't you take some other fellow—that stranger for a sample?" She was quiet a long while after this, as if

something in the way Dena did not talk back kind of scared her. Then, as if she was stepping into the ice-cold water of Dena's silence, one toe at a time, she said the verse that goes with throwing salt on the fire:

"It is not salt I aim to burn,
But my true lover's heart to turn,
Wishing him neither joy nor sleep
Till he come back to me and speak."

Old Homer's voice came nirly from his bed: "Let be, girls, let be! Leave your bearm and lay you down, and a man might maybe help himself to a dose of sleep."

And Bess was asleep right now.

Dena went on in her thoughts: "Earth burns his feet, and while he goes chasing, I stay here. His longings don't know any bounds—no more do mine, yet here at home I sit."

She patted the floor with a bare foot, as though eager to run the hills, too. "And why not with Bracy as good as Waits? He's a sight prettier favored, with his goldtorht hair, and heap o' times they tell how it makes no matter what man you marry, being he's a free 'n' making man. They tell you can get used to any man." She set the two side by side in her mind, and saw Waits, all dreaming and uncertain, and not in any manner a safe man—just one who was maybe feeling his way along life; while Bracy was a proud and strong beast, who had no need to feel for life—he stepped out and knew it.

Outside the night was dour and whispering; and

smoke blowing back down the chimney gave warning of rain soon to come.

"Supposing, for a sample, I *was* to go off with Bracy. . . ." She took the cold creeps down her backbone just thinking of it. "Still and all there'd be that place in my heart only Waits could answer to; and it's a surprise how solid the quiet can be when I cry out for him."

She watched the last-left faggot burn in two before she said: "I might make out like Waits is not wild-wandery—but that'd scarcely do me, either, for he'd no more be himself!"

Then Dena sat up straight and bright with an unwholesome thought. "Don't mean I'd have any honest-to-goodness truck with that man—Bracys and Morgans 'way too poorstock to content me—but I might maybe keep him to show Waitstill Lowe a thing or more!"

And she lay down and slept with this dour notion coiling about her head.

CHAPTER XIII

A SHOWER of moonlight washed through the soft night around the woodcutters' camp. It was so late that the last katy-did had given over and gone to rest against some thin-barked tree. The heat of the day had strayed on into the night, and none could find sleep in the tents; so they sat together in the clear patch under a black-jack oak, while the fiddler man gently stroked out tunes they knew from long ever ago.

The fiddler leaned against a tree, half in shadow, and Waits lay along the ground, with his eyes turned to watch every pull of the bow. The rest of them were lumps of light and shadow, save the twin boys, who sat straight upright upon a log. Their hair was twisted in peaks and spikes, and their great eyes were round with sleep, and their little hands clung against the log, white and sharp in the moonlight, showing like claws.

"Bob-'n'-Bill," Waits plagued them, "you are the picture of a pair of owls."

"Owls ain't twins," Bob said.

"Twins ain't owls, is what he aimed to say," spoke Bill.

"Owls would be *ashamed* to be twins," Waits said, and they ran and jumped on him, and the three of them had a play-game in the moonlight. But it was late night, and while Waits wrapped his strong arms

about the boys to hold them still, first one and then the other fell asleep between eyeblinks, the way child-things do. So he bade the fiddler play an easy tune, while he cradled the boys until they were sound, and their mother came and took them.

Directly the fiddler said to Waits: "Want to try what you can pull out of it?"

Waits stretched out a joyful hand. Gently he put the fiddle beneath his chin, warily he pulled the stick. He picked out the tune of *Devil's Banjo,* one sharp note at a time, but, save for the tune, the fiddle-box gave out nothing.

"Give it me back," the man said. And he played over his tunes, slowly, showing how the moaning is made, and how a lament may be taught to end in a shriek of sorrow. While Waits watched him, with his own fingers twitching, he showed how all the light-someness of rushing water could be bounced and tickled out of the fiddle-box. And he gave it again to Waits, who began to feel the way of it.

So they played it, first one and then the other, till the new morning's light. And Waits made his thanks, and the man said: "There is nothing!—" And directly he said, "I was afraid; but a man who can cradle child-things is a safe one with a fiddle."

Many nights thereafter they played, and sometimes at noon, where they carried the fiddle to the work with them for company. The craving to go outland went altogether out of Waits's head, and he trifled on, and his only thought was how he might get him a live fiddle for his ownself.

Weeks drifted by in full content, for Waits was even-strong with the tree-felling men whose trade it was. He learned to fall a tree to the line marked, in place of just tearing it down rough and cruel; and he gave life over to his body, while his mind lay idle, ripening, maybe, in the sun. This went on until the dry spell was a month gone, when all water in the lesser creeks went dry, and there was no water for any to get the bill' stuff sawed. There was wood a-plenty at the stacking sheds, and the cutters had to commence laying off days.

It happened to Waits that as soon as he laid down his axe, his head would pick up something and try to edzact it. On such a day he climbed the last mountain betwixt here and the valley country and stretched himself flat upon the earth and looked over it.

"August's a prize month for thinking, if a person don't get overly hot. Seems a man's head gets just about warmed up to thinking, come full summer. There's mostly a south wind in August and clouds come wandering slow, like they'd gone asleep on the way and was just only dreaming over the hills. The fields start to turn color, and the sky's so blue it seems the air is full of blue-mistiness. Some of it's forest fires. They come mostly in August, too. They'll creep all day, and when come night the least smidgen of wind will set 'em roaring and racing to the stars. Happen I could play a forest fire, gin I had me a fiddle. That would be a monstrous thing!"

Waits got himself up, but the heat of the day pressed him, and he put himself back where he was.

"N'er thing pleasures my mind about August is the big fat clouds that come up every morning o' the world and just set there in the blue sky with not a thing to do. Same as I'm acting now my ownself."

Out of nowhere a thought of Dena Howard dropped into his mind, but the spring magic had gone from around her, and eyes that could draw his heart in May, could not turn him one step back in August.

"Likely she'll be waiting, come I call her."

And the thought gave him shame for his lingering. What about his big talk of cities and ocean-seas and books that day he left her? She would be working the days through, with the care of the farmstead upon her, yet forgiving him for the sake of the ventures he was to go upon.

This time Waits properly got upon his feet, vowing to be gone with next morning's light. "Gin I can tear loose from that fiddle," he said slowly.

"And there's the sun going—going down the way it does this time o' year—waves 'n' waves of gold, with splashes of red fire for spray. Gold waves makes a man think what the ocean-sea may be like, only that'd be blue, of course. Time to be getting back to camp—time to be moving on; but a man may's well wait for the moon. And the moon in August—why, man-sir! she comes tearing up the sky like she was bent on saving the world from darkness!"

He woke next morning drowsily, his spirit filled with restlessness; and his half-wakened mind started him to get up, away from a red-headed man that was his bane; he could not see the face, but there were ugly

claws of fingers, stretched out on an arm spindling-looking and strong as wire, and the hands were reaching out for a fiddle. He wakened with home in his heart, but his head was bent yet more outland, and when he came up from washing himself in the branch, he told the men of it, and they consented without surprise, though in some sorrow, and paid him his wages, but the children wept, and Waits left them and went outland.

Before he had gotten the best part of a mile, he heard the step of the youngest man and the patter of the boy twins' feet, so he turned and waited for them to come up to him. When they had got thus far, all stood looking upon one another, unknowen what to say. There came the r-r-r-rat-tat-tat-tat when a woodpecker worked on a dead oak; and the barking of a squirrel handily up a tree. "Hark to that boomer!" one boy said gently. "Almost I can see him!" And words being broken, the man strode forward and said: "Efn you got to be going on, I'll show you a short way over. Hit'll save you the most of eight miles walking, but it's rough-like. Take yonder path down and keep down gully where the river's dried out, till you come to a narrows where a boat couldn't scarcely get by. Come you get that far, there's a straight-up rock, looks like it stops the way, but come you get close, there's the least mite of a crack to one side. Through that crack you'll find footholds for a way up the other side. . . . Come on away, boys! Leave this man alone —he's liable to be right smart eager to be in the city."

They were taken by the thicket, and Waits went on,

warm in his heart; and a bee zoomed around his head; and a single quail-bird whirred up, where he had all but put his foot on it at the edge of the last sun-patch.

He found the path and started down the gully. When he got to the bottom he could look up and see the rocks on either side climbing to heaven, and where he properly ought to have felt fearsome, he took simple joy. "The more out I am, the worse losel I get," he told himself. "Can't content myself but a man's made to do not a thing but take joy in creation. Heap o' folks never take time from their work, and they rightly ought to have somebody to joy for them. Supposing now, for a sample, the Government should take to paying wages to one man in every town to be joyful for the rest of them—then I'd be that man! —Wait-Still-on-the-Lord Lowe, I declare you must be gone clean crazy in the head. Get you up out of here before it witches you."

Through the darkly shadowed gully he found his way, marking the trees in his mind without sense of thought. "There's more he-balsams around here than a person could make away with; yonder rears a chinquapin, wonder me if they's ripe yet; that post-oak's plumb unnatural growing down here darksome—must 'a' slipped down with a rockslide and took root again. Plenty scrub and wiggin—funny how some trees likes other kinds, and gathers them around their feet that way."

Over the top of the gully, where the spruce trees pointed, the arch of the sky was linked across with

bright, white clouds, and two buzzards wove circles below them. The dark gully where Waits was, filled suddenly with the sound of a jarfly—the deep shrill of his August song spelling out noon to the listening world.

Only hot air flowed down the gully where cool water properly should have been, and it sent Waits sleepy-headed, and, while his footsteps went slower, his remembering mind marched back and back over the hill country, till it stood on Big Wolf Bald, and saw Howards' Place, with Dena in the front yard in the sunshine—Dena, fair to look upon and not doing a thing except wait for him to come home. And beyond lay Barts' Deadening, and he moved from the top of the Bald, and in an eye-clink was walking the short path below Cragg Hill, and pretty soon came to his own place, where Rashe and Barsha would be studying about him and where he might be. And his mind having got all the way home, his present body sat it down and leaned against a rock, while the sun made all oven-hot, and drew sleepy syrup from the he-balsam leaves.

Waits unrolled a packet of dinner food the women at the camp had fixed for him, and while he bit into the side-meat and bread, he bethought him of the handiness of women in this world—not that a man can't feed himself, come to that pass. Funny about needing food to live by. These he-balsams, so tall about him, fed straight out of the earth, and, as a consequence, went on to all eternity. His mind played with the word Eternity as he had heard it uttered in the

church house at home. He rolled it this way and that in his head and could make nothing out of it.

"Eternity is wide each way and every side. Eternity is long—yet a man must live today—and today goes and tomorrow comes—and if Eternity means that that kind of foolishness goes on forever, it's the same as telling a man he's going bereft of his senses."

Waits took a mouthful of bread, to have something solid to chew on, and he threw a piece of crust to a redbird that had no right to be down gully, with all that sun going to waste up yonder. But the redbird was finding something to excite his head under the twinkles on the bank, and didn't right-away see the bread.

But there was something besides. "What did the preacher say? 'Free of all cares of this mortal flesh.' Maybe things would be different without a body. Eternity might that way be, in a manner, useful. Then, if a man's got to go on living forever and ever without a body, why in sense and reason did the Lord interrupt him with one for a matter of three score years and ten?" The Almighty that Waits had been taught about was most survigrous puzzling, when a person tried to fit him in with this fine-pretty world. Being interfering and bodaciously hot-tempered with sinners, how come He made such a joyful world of it? Waits was fain to believe the old preachers must have made a mistake, and that the real Lord in heaven was One who understood what a man wanted and couldn't get at.

The redbird found him his piece of bread, but

Waits never found himself in his mind. Even should he talk with some other person about all this queerness—most likely they'd all be like himself, drawing water in a milk strainer and catching no cream. And Waits gave himself over to the hot stillness and slept, wearied out with studying on high matters, and with trying to search out the Lord's purpose.

He wakened when a lonely wind shivered through the hot trees, and arose and kept on his way. The gully grew narrow and rocks drew in on either side. Here was the rock that stopped him going forward, and he looked for the faulting to let him through. When he found it, he got him over, not without some scratches, and searched out footholds enough to get him up out of the blind end. And he three times made up his mind that it would have come cheaper to have kept to walkable ways and trodden the eight miles saving. Coming this way he'd get the sooner into naked open country, and the notion was not so pleasant as he had thought other times.

The beginning strangeness of the edgelands and foothills gramyed him in such wise he could scarcely go on—but for fear of laughter he had to win out to anyway one city; and the thought of the ocean-sea point-blank distracted him by this time.

As though it was not enough to give a man the all-overs, thinking how the last night in the safe hills grew near, a dusk crept over the sky, and those good-tempered-looking clouds growled once and were still.

"Before a man knows what is," Waits told himself, "he's liable to be surrounded by a storm o' rain and

wetted right smart. I'm bound to search me a rock. Efn I'd been knowen a while back all I've learned this hour, I'd have stayed down in that river crack. I might, too, have been knowen. Hit's such a day as perfectly brews thunder with its lumped-up clouds; but since that first grummeling there's been ne'er a sound."

The clouds changed silently, each taking up his ordered place ready for battle; there was a great stillness of thunder yet in breeding, and large winds held behind the empty spaces of the air, and rain waiting to drown the hot world in one strong burst. And upon the earth not a tree-leaf flickered, birds were silent and no insect hummed. There was no sound to the ears; only the pressing down of the solid quiet. The earth lay still as a fallen tree, and grew ever darker as the storm's mirk threatened over it. A lance of lightning struck through the drawn ranks of clouds, and at the sign thunder leapt forward with a vast deep cry.

And now dry lightning shot its arrows at the tall places, and Waits made of himself a small bundle against a rock and near to the spread roots of a grandsir white-oak tree.

"Hit'd be funny," he said, "efn the lightning took it in head to strike on this rock and roll it on me. I'd be plumb spoiled."

Then began the great rain. It burst solidly athwart the world, swirling, roaring.

"Too much water," Waits said, peering humbly from his rock shelter. "Seems my ocean-sea's already come down from heaven." And he shrank back from the gray wall of water that drove before him.

The storm fought above the earth for an hour, and another hour, and when the day was turning into night it wore itself out, and Waits crept from beneath the rock, and shook himself, dogwise, of rain splatters. He climbed upon the top of his rock to content himself that all was over, for his spirit had been shrunk within him, and he wished to feel a man again, and a person before the Lord. And he saw blue rain creeping along the crests of the yonder hills, and the storm, broken in fragments, lying scattered and spread out upon the hills in tattered clouds.

There came one clink of sun ere evening, and its level path found a way through gaps and crannies till it fell upon a gray rock boulder near to hand, and turned it more colors than a man could reckon. And the green goldness of everything was a sight on earth. There was a drowsy sound of birds, ready for roosting with the sun's going down, yet trying to keep awake so long as to shake dry their feather coats, and give a thanksgiving chirrup for the storm's passing on.

And now the sun and the birds both were gone and in the lead-gray calm the shadows of Waits's thoughts flitted in packs like long-ago wolves streaking by, hot on some trail. He felt them go but could not tell where they led. So not to stand still in such uneasy company, Waits climbed down from his rock and went on steadfastly.

CHAPTER XIV

He came in the dusk of eveglôm upon a fire and a traveler cooking bacon over it, and being bid he sat down and they shared the bacon and some talk besides. And Waits added the rest of his cold bread to the meal.

"Friends have all things in common," the man said.

"True words."

While they were eating, Waits saw that the man was a slack-twisted, torndown person, dirty in body and clothes, with a pulpy skin full of wrinkles. His lower cheeks and chin were covered with short black hairs that had been scraped off close as might be with a clasp-knife, and these hairs were hard, and had the look of having been planted from without upon the dough of his face instead of growing from within. And the hair of the man's head, when he took off his fearful hat, showed as if decaying off him.

"Wish we had us some coffee to drink," the man said.

"What's gone wrong with spring water?" Waits asked him.

"Water never did set on my food. Hardens it. Ain't wholesome."

He got upon his wornout feet and shambled off to break a cooking-stick from a green bush. His heavy

black trousers were pig dirty, and they were pinned in a bunch at his middle, for they were mightily too large for him. His shirt had been with him such a while it was unknowen what color it was meant to be, and it was open at the neck and a red kerchief was tied there, and from the end of that sick-looking rag a clasp-knife hung down.

When the man got sat down again, he coiled up like something that was broken at the joints, and was just a heap in the firelight. He looked to Waits as if he had set out long ever ago and never got there. "He's in more of a mess than Uncle Shannon Budd," Waits wondered at him.

"I'm a traveling man," the tramp told him, "and my trade is seeing the world. I've been far and beyond."

"I aim to do as much," Waits said, while inside himself he puzzled if a man was bound to wipe up all the grease and dirt in the world if he took a habit of roaming.

"What work do you follow?" he asked him.

There was a pride in the man yet, for he held his head up when he said: "Me and work quarreled and never made it up."

Waits pondered this.

The moon was not yet full bright, and she was pestered with cloud-wrack, so that in watching her light come and go Waits lay back along the rain-dark earth and let his head take its way, while his body laid it up seeds of rheumatism for yonder years. The man, who was a tramp, and old, and cared for no moon

whatsoever, cooked him another piece of bacon, turning it on the long stick; and he sorrowed that so much good grease had to be lost in the fire and wished he had him a skillet.

" 'Twasn't a common tick, neither," the tramp said after a while, as he pulled down the rags of his trouser-leg. "It was one of these here rampaging ticks what takes him out a bite o' meat. Let's talk. A man don't meet up with comp'ny to supper every night o' the world."

It made Waits shy to speak about talking, and ere all his words hid from him, he made haste and said with manners: "Do you commonly harbor wood-ticks?"

"You'd be surprised all I harbor," the tramp said proudly, "and not only ticks, neither."

This distasted Waits, and he asked: "Happen you know the way out towards a city? All these roads where I'm not acquaint look ravelty to me as yarn on spindle. Where-all you last from?"

"Paducah!" the man said in a grunt, so Waits did not rightly know whether he had spoken a word or not.

"That's west from here," the tramp said, "and you ought to be bound north. Get you on the state highway down here at Parton's Cove, and keep going on till you get to a city."

"Kind thanks," Waits said.

"All roads is the same," the tramp told him. "It's being on them—traveling—that's the main thing. It's not in reason any one town on earth can hold all a man

craves, so I learned long years ago to move betwixt 'em and soak up the world as it come to me."

The go-about was sitting there in front of the fire, with his knees pulled up around his ears and his arms wrapping his legs together. He was a perfect waste of a man, as a person could tell from his slippery mouth and blurred eyes. Yet he sat there, putting words to what Waits was craving—to go unbound and not beholden, and work or not as chanced. Waits had never thought but the end would be as good as the yearning—but if this man was the fruit of *that* tree, Waits bethought him to ravel back to the start and begin again.

He wanted the worst way to know what this man had drawn out of life, and since he was a no-account person it would not be outside all manners to ask flat out. But he looked at him yet a little while, and the tramp stared into the fire, and smelled forlornly at an empty flask out of his coat pocket. The moonlight broke in splinters on the massed wet leaves.

"A man can't be in love and wise at the same time," the tramp said out of nothing. "Similarly, you can't look for a thing but laying on wet earth from a young fellow about your age. Pick you a rock, same as I done, and spread your coat."

Waits rested quiet and then got up and searched him out a dry rock, and thought about being in love, which, as a consequence, called up Dena—Dena, who would tread softly all her days, staying for him and never weary, not quarreling if he came late.

"Who told you the news about me being in love?" Waits wanted to know.

"All youngsters is, or should be."

For that the man was unclean, Waits kept Dena's name away from there, and he spoke widely, saying: "Women can wait."

The tramp croaked a laugh. "A woman's pretty time is short—make haste, young man."

"Only short if happen it isn't written on the heart of the man that loves her," Waits made answer. "Being so, it goes on." He was taking a distaste for this man.

"No need for him to waste her body while it glows," the tramp told him.

"Don't you own any religion towards womenkind?" Waits snapped at him, while he jumped up to stamp on a flown faggot from the fire; the man curled back, with his arm raised above his head, believing Waits was about to strike him, for the boy's face was bright as a flame and hard set. But when Waits was safely sat down again, the tramp said: "I don't know one thing about religion; and as to women, well, sir, if I was a young feller, and in love with a special dainty bit of flesh, I'd go kurling on home to her."

And this advice being somehow good out of so much evil, he rolled over and slept, where he had raked him up some leaves; and Waits fixed him his bed yon side on a gravelty patch.

Surely it must be turning time, he thought, for he had awakened this morning with homeward feelings in his head, and as soon as he laid his body down tonight

he could see back so far as Glen Hazard right now. As he looked, he could see through a white low-hung mist, the ridge pole of the cabin roof and the crowstick chimney's ragged edge, the vines growing over the well-house, and bryony taking all the fence corners.

A brightness of firelight came out of the open door, and within were shadows, wistful and lone. Inside the house his mind saw the dark logs with yellow mud betwixt, and the big yawny chimney and strips of red peppers and white onions, and other drying stuff swinging from the rafters. A woman, his mother, bent to the fire and laid a faggot across it, and as she did this, she was Dena; and Rashe, sitting back in his chair, was looking at somewhat between them; and Waits himself was sitting in his father's chair and the thing he could not see before came clear to him—a child-thing, sitting upon a high-legged stool looking in the fire with eyes round with sleep and seeing wonders. And Waits's own voice came, saying: "Why ain't you in bed? You'll get stunted setting up so late. Whyn't you lay him down, Dena?" And Dena's voice: "Takes more 'n me to get that buzzard into bed come he makes his mind set to stay up." And it was Barsha speaking, and Rashe sat in his own place, and when Waits strained to see what he was looking at between them, there was nothing any more save white mist filling the lowland to the brim and the moon silvering all things.

And Waits was torn within himself and sorely troubled, for that the end of staying pent was Dena and home and that little tad, maybe, in the chair in front of the fire;—and the end of his now wastrel

ways that he joyed in was that losel sleeping yon side of the burnt-out fire, with his perjured hat pulled over his wrecked and snoring face.

"God!" Waits asked—and after the manner of his race he commanded a listening ear—"God! efn you aimed to give me ary sort of a headpiece on my shoulders to think with, why ever 'n' all did you make it so doubtful?" He spoke straight up into the black opening in the Milky Way as the likeliest spot left open. "I'm getting totally et up with wandering 'n' craving, and pretty soon I'll lose all power whatsoever. Gin you want a man down here," he went on, "being you want a woman-loving, child-getting, trade-gripping man—what-all you aim to do?"

After the moon had traveled an hour's journey and the shadows shifted, Waits made full cry: "God—here's my torn-up-ness lying spread out before you—do you aim to take 'n' mend it?"

But God kept His silence.

Only the whip-poor-will's cry drained through the darkness— "Whip-pur-will!—whip-pee-ur-will!"— the dowiest sound to be heard in all the world—far off and lonely and afraid past all hope. And if Waits had known any thought but his own, he would have likened it to Dena's heart, while she listened to the whip-poor-will that same night.

Now the moon came out clear, and the light scared the night bird so that it broke its cry in pieces: "Whip!" —and after time had passed, "whip! whip!" And when a person had about forgot it, very quiet and low—"Whip . . . pur . . . wee-oo!"

CHAPTER XV

When the day was fully come, Waits left the tramp sleeping in an unhealthy bundle of himself, and took the walkable way until he came upon the down road.

He set off to get to the open country, though most doubtful in his mind that he maybe ought to be headed back up towards Glen Hazard. He waited till dawn before starting out, since he was going upon strange country, and when the day came it did not amount to much, being gray and unsettled in its mind whether to rain or leave it alone. A few clouds trailed low and gave back the queerest light ever to be seen on earth.

The road wound on, and was held up into a kind of ledge by logs and rocks on its outer side, but it was gouted by heavy rains and so storm-washed it could scarcely serve for more than a horseback road till the upper banks were cleaned back. Waits listened to the dripping water from off the craggy rocks above, and the sudden patter of a shower as something shook the trees down the slope on his right hand.

Soon the mists from the valley began to creep up the heights till he couldn't tell where he was going, and had to take slow, careful steps not to walk himself over the edge.

"Hit ain't the heartenest day," he gloomed. "I might maybe had ought to turn back." But he thought of the city and the heaped-up bunches of people, and told himself he had best go on. Then he recalled Dena, and that look in her eyes the night he left her—a look as if she was frozen up and yet lovely, like a water-branch that frost has caught and held in its tracks, ready to go again when sun should come warm—and he had the simple thought to go back and thaw her out. And as soon as he thought he would turn back, the sun came out and he undertook to go on. "Might have some news and tellings to carry back to her, come I win to the city and see sights. And I can carry books, too, happen there should be any in the town."

He had now passed the last bend of the road, and gone down the last grade, where laurel was fighting for place by ferns and scrub oak, and now he was come fairly into the valley country, where the fences ran tight along each side of the chert road and fence-corners were bright with pokeweed.

The last mountain stopped as if it had been pared off with a knife. It fell smack on the flatlands and then quit. From that minute there was a different kind of grass and fields; a yellower color to the fodder that was shocked up ready for hauling; different colored earth—and the air smelled strange to Waits's nose. It smelled so powerful strange that he got scared and turned around to look back on his last mountain, half-minded to go back to its shelter; but he kept on, and in a mile or such a matter came upon a town. No wonder the air smelled queer, for the wind was from

it, and the wet morning air carried its taint low along the ground.

When he got into this lowland town, he found it a pleasant place, with a Court House and some churches with pointed steeples, and smart painted houses set where they had happened to alight, here and there among grass-grown streets. There were wagons hitched already to the railing that surrounded the Court House, and cars were chuttering around seeking places to come to rest. It was most perfectly like Massengale, his own county town, save that the men stood in crowds, talking, waiting for court to open, where up at Massengale every man held himself single, and put in the time thinking what was to do. These were countrymen, too, but they moved slower than the hill people, though times they would break out running to catch up with themselves. Waits stood upon the corner by the Drug Store while he watched things happening in the town. Now and then some citizen would look hard on him, and he always gave back a fierce frown in return. And after a while, when court took up, he left that town and won out upon a highway, slick and hard and straight-away, but dangerous to a man's life on account of automobiles.

"Hit's a scandal," he complained, when the wind from a passing car carried his hat off, "hit's a scandal a man can't walk but in fear of his life."

The valley had been put about by too much rain from yesterday's storm, and the spare water lay in hollows in the fields, like bright silver, broken and

scattered wide. And when Waits looked back at the hills they were dim behind him, and sad with mist and smurr.

Though edged with mountains, this was a wide and fertile valley, and there was much cattle turned out to pasture. The beasts were round and fat, unliken the little brown cows at home that had their ribs showing no matter how much fodder a person wasted on them. As well as these big cow-beasts, there were sheep, and, in a field to themselves, horses. Waitstill never had heard tell of any man owning more than one horse at one time. Mostly folks used mules up at home. He devysed it in his mind that these must be all the horses from one town put together in a rented field.

Far off there was a farm-place, and Waits made to go that way, thinking perhaps dinner, but when he came close he saw it to be but a down-gone dwelling, and thought about going on. But there was no other place handy to go. When he had found his way across the dirty yard, picking his feet up and setting them down carefully among the old cans and house trash, like a cat crossing water, he hollered at the door, and a lorn-looking woman dragged it open and stared at him like she might be seeing a ghoulie.

When he had told his need, she said after him: "Dinner?" like she never had heard such a word.

"Yes'm—dinner," Waits said, not being knowen what ailed her. Where he had come from a person was not used to have the door held on them, or to have to

ask more than one time either for food or shelter. These might be low-country manners, in which case, being empty, he did not take kindly to them.

"Dinner," he said once more, and then bethinken these must be poorlanders, who often as not did not eat if it could be done without, he said: "I'll pay efn you should so want."

For answer the woman pointed down the road.

"There's another house a couple-miles down," she said. "I'm alone here."

Waits backed away from the door. "I'll be getting on," he said, "and excuse my manners."

At the next house where he asked to be fed the woman wrapped some scraps of bread and red meat in a newspaper and handed it to him where he stood, in place of asking him in to a table. He sensed this was the way sudden guests were fed down valley, so he took off his hat and made his thanks and went on his way, chewing the broken food.

There was nowhere to walk but the hard road, and it seemed the cars needed all of that. He got altogether tired of jumping from them.

The houses in these parts were strange things, and Waits saw they were mostly of two kinds; there were the big, dirty-looking board houses, like down-gone barns, and there were the little, spread-out houses with a lot of rooms all low and flat, as if the place had been builded workmanly and then been sat on by a mistake. The little houses were more often painted in bright colors, or else covered with pebble-dash. Waits wondered him about the big houses. He said: "A man

scarcely needs a house at all in summer-time, and in winter a home-place ought properly to wrap a man around and warm him. These places fit loose and they're likely to be bodaciously cold."

He walked on for the length of that day, and began to wonder him where he had best ask a night's rest. As he had been used to do, Waits hollered at the house where he happened to be when night fell too dark for further journeying. When the man came to the door, Waits said: "How about me spending the night in your house?" And the man only said: "You're drunk —that's what you are—get on with you!" and he slammed the door. So Waits found a likely barn, and had got him nested in a wagon against a sack of feed, when a boy carrying a lantern came and drove him off ungraciously saying: "Come out o' that now! We don't allow tramps on our place."

Nights thereafter he tried sleeping in field corners, but it uneasied him, being so naked open, and not decent as in his home country, where there would be anyway a rock or a lush place of bushes for shelter.

Once more he tried for night's lodgment in a simple-looking up-and-down board house. It might be the folks therein were fellowly, so he hollered, but the man that came to the door was a colored man, and Waits's manners so far forsook him that he turned and ran and never slackened until the place was out of sight behind him.

So he slept as might be thereafter. And furthermore he bought his food at road-crossing stores, for that when he asked at houses, sometimes he would be

told to go along—which was an unheard of thing whatever—and more often would be fedded out broken food like he might maybe be a new kind of two-legged dog. It made his pride hurt him, and he paid at the stores in rather.

Every day the mountains spread back further and thinner, and flatter and lighter blue, till a man could scarcely tell if that was a far hill against world's edge, or just maybe a mist cloud lying along the ground. Waits got bodaciously tired, and the city he had suspected himself of being in right now, kept journeying before him so he got no nearer. Of course, he knew more than to think he would come straightway down from the hills into a readymade city-place, but he had never figured on finding such a power of valley space first. There was a heap too much of it to be funny. And day after tired-out day Waits thought, where was the use of such a lot of flatness? It did not make any kind of world a man would want to live in.

Worse than this, he lost the time o' day. He had been in the habit of judging the hours by the look of the slant of sun on special slopes or peaks. Down in these parts light was the same all morning; and then it shifted, and glanced back from the other side all afternoon. Even at home a man could not tell time on a rainy day—but who on earth *needed* to tell time on a wet day?

And now Waits stood very still in the road where he was walking, and he drew deep breaths to try and get the habit of the new air that felt swashy and sodden. And back of his eyes there was still a look of

wonder and fun, for he had come out to see whatever, and see he was bound to, even if he drowned in this air trying to do it. Then he wished he had a fiddle to talk to him. It would cheer a person up and make him not so hot and dusty—or anyway make him forget about it. The fun in his eyes turned wistful as he marched on, for the hot day droned all around him and the sparkle of the sun was so sharp that he had to screw up his eyes, for that there was no distant shade or hillside of green trees where he could rest them.

A swift car recalled him to this place. It fled by with a shriek from its hooter that bent his ears. "That would 'a' been too late for all save my burying, happen I'd not been out o' the way a'ready. Where's the sense of 'waring a person after they're by?" he quarreled. "Nothing but time-everlasting automobiles! And no wonder wagons is scarce; they'd not have time to get along. Life's a lot too hasty in this country."

But next minute he saw a mocking-bird by the roadside right to his hand, and not anyways put out by the traffic, and straightway he let go his mad. "There's perfectly a piece of home!" he said. "There he sets, balanced on the fence-top, singing joyful—and in the smack middle of the day if you'd believe a person!" Somehow it had never come to his mind that mockers and simple home things would be down outland. It made him feel brave as a man that meets a friend on a lone and dangerous trail. "Shouldn't wonder but there's redbirds, too," he said, "and likely grasshoppers and such—hi-yar!

And now his money was giving out again.

"Hit's fair took a habit o' that!" he grieved, while he looked at the bunch of dimes and quarters that was the leftments of his pay from the woodcutters. "More than that, my shoes is dying, my hat is dead, and a new shirt would maybe keep me from disgracing the place I come from." He put his fragments back, and strolled along thinking about the need of clothes and what a tiresomeness it is to a man.

"Could a man get a job of work in this country?" he wondered. "Supposing, for a sample, a man went up to a mill or a farm-place and said, 'Need any help?' —would they most likely wrap it in a newspaper and throw it out to him?" And Waits threw back his head and laughed and laughed, and directly, when he was over it, he puzzled that his heart was always freest when his money was short. "Which spells," he said, "that I'm a true-born losel."

At the end of that day with the sun just thinking about going down, he drew near to a farm-place that looked big and costly enough to give a job of work to all kinds of men. The first he saw of it was a big wooden barn building, whitewashed and having windows that flashed the last sun back as if the place was afire. All around at the back edge of the farm stood fir trees, and a wild-cherry tree rejoiced by itself alone in the middle of a hither field. When Waits got closer, he could see the house, made out of red bricks with ivy growing over it, and the wooden porch-posts and

trimmings, fancy-carved and newly white-painted. In front of the house grass was cut short and it was very green; and a garden-piece was kept off from the house by a line of apple trees. There were fields on all sides, and—to keep the farm part from eating up the dark red house—old elm trees spread soft branches around it, till the house looked as if cradled in a warm nest.

Waits stood at the white paling fence and thought about going in; and thought about staying out; and was about to holler, when the door opened, and from out this clean and ordered home came the hairiest man Waits ever had clapped eyes upon. His short, thick gray hair was stuck end on into his head, and grew nearly as thick down his back neck as on top. He had no collar, so his shirt had flown open and showed his furry chest. His small, strong hands were covered with hair as far up as the rolled-back cuffs showed; and his face was so bearded it joined up with his hair, while the big eyebrows filled up the top of his face, and his eyes looked out surprised from their hiding in this bush as if the man suspected himself of being somebody else. All in all, it seemed to Waits that the man might have fallen into a tub of Fayre Jones's patent hair cure and it had worked master.

In place of looking forthright at the visitor, as a homemade man would do ere bidding welcome, he gave Waits a quick side-glance, with something sharp and ready in it, as if he thought Waits might want to do a hurt to him or his properties. Still, when he turned his head full forward, his eyes were mild

enough, and Waits told his name and where-from, and asked if perhaps, work?

The man held a pipe in his mouth, and after drawing in a mort of smoke, he took the pipe from betwixt his lips and blew out the smoke in one long cloud.

"Let's see,"—the man studied him a while—"I think I can do with an extra man for a few days, though I don't like picking up tramps."

"I'd best be getting on," Waits said.

"Know how to carpenter?" the man questioned, not paying special heed to Waits.

"Leave me get hold of a saw 'n' hammer," Waits granted, "and I can—some. It's not my regular trade, but I've helped raise houses."

"Well, I'll try you. I've got a good man now, but he needs help."

Waits followed the hairy man around back, and while he went he snuffed the air to get used to the smell of the place, and it was sweet with summer and the trees.

The carpenter was putting his tools in a box for over night, and he showed no great joy at seeing the kind of helper the farmer had picked off the road for him; and when he had nodded "How d'ye" he shoved his tool box under a bench in case of rain, and walked off.

And the farmer said to Waits: "You can sleep in the room in the top of the barn and eat with the other hands up at the house." And he left Waits standing in the middle of the yard like something there was no use for.

A clock from somewhere in the house struck six little dings, and in answer Waits said: "You're another person out o' place. Properly a striking clock for a big homestead ought to say 'Boom!' "

The farm hands came stamping into the back yard from all sides and corners, about ten when all were come. At the basins set out on the back porch they washed hands and faces; and went and brushed their hair, and pushed one another from in front of the wavy looking-glass. They all ate supper at a long table on the closed-in back porch. The table was covered with white oil-cloth and each man was given a big plate heaped up with meat and rice and green stuff all he should want, but nothing put on the table in big serving dishes, and Waits thought this was mean, though having on his plate all he could rightly get away with. Then the farm wife gave every man a quarter of pie and all the coffee he could hold.

The farm wife was a shrunk-up little woman, like a dried apple. If she could get out of the kitchen and soak in an easy time for a spell, she might plump up. She had too much to do to spare talk with the boys, but she gave back cheery answer when they plagued her.

The men got up and walked off according as they got through, and none of them noticed Waits save for a nod or a "How d'ye," being used to new hands coming and going, and after they had eaten, each man went his way and Waits sat lonely on the fence, and made faces at the moon, and wished he had a fiddle for company.

NEXT morning the carpenter, whose name was called Emery, told Waits to go ahead and put lap-boarding down one side of the storehouse he was building, and, when he had watched which end Waits hit a nail, he went on with his own work. By middle morning he found out that Waits never needed more than three licks to get a nail bedded, and this contented him, so he began to talk, and edzacted out to him about the farm owner, the little hairy man and his womenfolk. And Emery told how the wife-woman was worked to near a bone because of the man grudging to pay a cook help; and about the two girls, half grown but not having their minds set to house-tending. They kept putting at their father to let them go from the place and get work up in the city; and they were a lot too head-high to mix with the hired men—but all the same one of them had all except lost herself, and her father drove off the man.

Emery did not see any fun in farm girls. His sweetheart lived in the city and worked in an eating house, waiting table; and Emery was bound to go there soon to see after her, because of another fellow who was following around.

They hammered and sawed all morning, and by the time noon came Waits had a new notion in his head that had never been there before—and it was a surprise, too, knowen how delicate sweet Dena was. "Supposing," his notion said, "take for a sample, that *some other fellow* had taken a habit of plaguing around Dena." It had never come to pass in his head that she would do aught but wait for him.

Directly Emery fed him another notion. Dena might be mad and have taken a spite, and so gone tinkering with ary wastrel. "Women is that way," Emery told him.

"Jumping trout and moonbeams!"—Waits flung down his hammer and was about to set off.

"Where you going to?" Emery said.

"Home."

"Now—this minute?"

Waits nodded his head—yes.

"What for?"

"I'm bound to see to that girl of mine, gin I aim to have any of her left."

Emery laughed till Waits turned dark red color under his sunburned skin. Then Emery said: "What's the use of hurry? If she's the losing kind, she'll have lost herself ere this; and you'd as good stay and finish building this house and get you some money."

It took a long while to alter Waits's mind, once it got set, but he eased back to work—though from that moment it point-blank discontented him, and he was like a man dragged two ways.

CHAPTER XVI

DAY came solemnly over Glen Hazard, pale with the long summer marches, and near the well-house on Howard's place Dena stood looking at the dawn, for the weather did not amount to much these hot days, and she was fearful of a storm of rain. All the soft wind in the world drifted through the trees with a voice of sighing and was gone beyond the far hills; it was the time of silence ere the lean hours walked up the sky.

Dena was bereft, these weary days, of all the things she had held to. She felt as the arm of a climbing vine might feel when a person pulled its tinsey fingers that held so tight. She set down her water bucket, and pulled back a little piece of vine from around one of the well-house posts to see how it might be; and stopped, lest she might be hurting it.

"Likeliest person I know to take safe hold on," she said, "is Barsha Lowe. Wonder me is the year too late along for a egg-setting? I'm bound to carry a gift to excuse myself visiting with her, and eggs is all I got."

She filled her water bucket and went again within-doors. While she put the eggs in a safe box, she told Bess whither she was bound, and that she would take her dinner with the Lowes if she was bid; and so set

forth, leaving Bess mightily in the sulks at all to do and no joy in life whatever.

While she went across the twin-oak field, Dena thought: "I'd give a lot to be not so torn up. Maybe gin I haunt 'round where Waits was raised, I'll get this go-about Bracy out o' my head. Hit's long ever ago I give over the notion of using him to plague Waits with—I wouldn't be-nasty myself to do so—but he's evermore topmost in my head, and Waits in a manner fading till I can scarce recall the shape of his mouth or the sound of his voice."

It came sib with the loury day that she had no sooner gone down into the low path below Cragg Hill that makes the short cut from Howards' to Lowes', than a dark line of shadow fell beside her, and she jumped back from it before she well saw it was Burl Bracy.

"You've took a fair habit of chasing me," she told him. "Go on away, and take shame with you for that piece of acting."

He surely to goodness was fair to look upon, but he was low stock, or never would he dare come nigh her soon again like this. None but poor stock trash would chase a woman like she might maybe be a rabbit or whatever.

Bracy stood smiling upon her with his mouth, his white teeth shining and ready to snap, but his eyes all soft-silky like a dog's just ere it goes asleep.

Properly Dena thought to walk off from him. But walking off from Bracy was not an easy matter. His eyes held a person, and it seemed as if she ought to

say why she was walking off, and to give a reason.

A squirrel flickered from a spiceberry bush and ran chittering up a near tree.

And waking as from an evil dream and tearing at the spell that bound her, Dena got her eyes free, and started along the path with her head high and a free swing to her body. That was better than dandering talk with him.

But Burl Bracy was not put about. He had caught this kind of bird before, so he stood still where he was and flung words after her.

"Can't a person happen on another person without pride thinking it's being chased?"

And Dena was almost stung into turning around, but held on her way as if not hearing, calling herself both kinds of a fool ever to have thought he had come by of a purpose. Yet, walk fast as she might, she could not get from under the notion that Bracy would be watching from a thickety patch, or some such hidey-hole.

The day had gone middling gray, and was neither raining nor letting it alone. The heat still pressed heavily, but now the sun was shielded it did not any more burn a person up. Dena walked delicately, for vines ran here and there over the single path and a person is liable to get tangled and to slip over, more especially if they carry eggs and try to keep from it. She stood the box down over the fence at the edge of Lowes' hither field before she climbed over, and when she had picked them up again she went on over the field, puzzling in her mind if she ought to have

come. Eggs were not enough reason, since she had never taken the habit of carrying egg-settings over to Lowes', and she was the least bit scared of both Rashe and Barsha, they being proud and lonely people. All the same, Waitstill being theirs, they could not be so terrifying, and they had been free with their consent to his courting her. While she came near to the little gray house she thought had they both been dragons she could not have kept herself away. She needed to have talk with Barsha, and for no better reason than that Barsha was the nearest thing on earth to Waits that she could come in reach of. Moreover she was a mother-woman and likely knew what a mess menfolk were world without end.

Since long ever ago, when the girls' mother had died, Barsha had done the Howards much kindness, yet Dena had never got to feel easy with her, for that Barsha never mixed in with other folks' affairs, and did all her neighborliness with a long arm. She would send over a baking of deep pie come a Sunday, or have Waits walk across during a low spell of weather with blankets she claimed to have no use for. Recalling these things and wondering would Barsha take the eggs as they were meant, Dena stood at the yard gate and was in two minds about kurling off into the woods.

But Barsha was sitting on a chair in the doorway, looking harmless as need be, and mending a hole in Rashe's coat. So Dena came on up the path and stood shy and waiting to be spoken to, while Barsha looked up and sewed her through as if her eye might have

been a needle. And with that look, Barsha knew all about why Dena had come, for she saw the need of Waitstill crying back of the girl's eyes, by the need she had to lay her own eyes upon that downgone scoundrel.

Through being a penned-at-home woman, when rightly she needed wide space, Barsha had grown gnarledy and bent—trying to fit herself into her life the shape it was. She was large-boned and thin, and her sharp edges made her severe. She was not to be taken free-mannered. Dena thought she looked a hard and fierce woman all the way from her puckery face and sharp chin down to the heavy shoes that just showed below her gray calico dress. She roached back her white hair to a knot at the back of her head, and that set forward her nose, which was something too small for her long face, and sharp enough to smell out anything. Waits used to say it was sorry use trying to hide ary thing so long as Ma's nose was around the house; and she scared him when he was a little tad, claiming she could see and hear with it, too.

Now Barsha said to Dena: "Step in and rest you a while."

"No'm, I guess I'd better be getting back. I didn't come but to bring you this egg-setting of Red Island chickens. They weren't scarcely worth the trouble."

"I'll be just as glad to have them," Barsha made answer. "Put 'em by somewhere, and sit you down."

Dena stood the box of eggs around the door-post where they would not handily get stepped in, and carried her a chair to be near Barsha in the doorway.

She sat still as a rock at first, but after time went on and Barsha did not speak again, Dena said: "They don't rightly do so well in these parts as Dominickers, but they're tasty eating, once you can raise 'em."

"A person wants a little chicken-meat, odd days," Barsha said—thinking about Dena sitting there to be near a person who was, in a manner, part of Waitstill.

Dena watched Barsha sewing; and she took notice that Barsha's ears were large and willing but not over eager.

"Your garden things are coming on heartily," Dena said, when her eye had traveled over the garden-piece and watched the dark leaves glistering on the bushes.

Barsha stopped her hands from her mending and her mind from its long thought, and she looked out upon the garden-piece.

"I've a chancey lot of flowers," she owned. "The way hotness pulls up flower-things makes a person jump in their skin."

From a far piece back in her head, Dena asked her: "What is your sun?"

Barsha had lived too long in this world to be mazed with any such question. "At my years," she told Dena, "hope of a next and better life is all the sun that keeps me living; which is the way it ought to be."

While Barsha looked up from her shadowed doorway to where the clouds moved, light and dark, above Cragg Hill, Dena saw that her eyes were green-hazel color, and would most likely take in all that was to be seen of life. They were eyes that had seen a mort of trouble and not been hurt thereby, so that she

looked peaceful mostly. A shadow of pain came now and then, and a look of doubt at times, but no discontent or fear.

A time after this Dena said: "Don't seem like I can get e'er a mite o' warmness at all out of your kind of comfort."

Barsha smiled with the smile she saved to go with special words, when she said: "Hit's not in reason it would be hot enough for your age. That kind of sun's got a streak of chill in it—sun always has at eveglôm. You need high noon of a middle-summer day to content you; and that can't be a thing except loving and being loved."

Dena was yet watching the garden, and when this last notion had gone through her head, she said: "Efn ary person was to go off a far piece anywheres, seems like he'd send back word, or a postal letter, or somewhat."

Barsha's eyes screwed up at their corners, and her mouth was pressed together, but she was threading her needle, and likely that was all that ailed her face.

"Appearedly he would," was all the help she gave Dena.

Her face was full of useful wrinkles, marking where Time had trodden careless, unknowen that what he stepped on might be soft and yielding and crush up under his weight. A deep cleft was worn betwixt her eyes, and lines ran down the cheeks by the long, straight mouth—laughter, or sorrow, a person scarcely knew which to think. Even the droop at the left corner might

be sadness, or else some fun she did not share. Most likely both, Dena thought.

So Dena sat back in her chair making tucks in the edge of her dress, with her hands that pleaded to Barsha to unfold all she knew. And Barsha looked at the girl, when she was unaware, and all her life's kindliness came into her eyes. But when Dena raised her head, pricked by that look, Barsha just said: "I surely undoubtedly am grieved about your tongue getting paralyzed. Times gone by, when you was a tinsey child, you'd chit-chatter a heap—though never so fast as Bess, I'll say that for you. What's gone with the tongue in your head, Allardene Howard?"

It seemed as if Dena did not hear right away, but afterwards she said: "Hit's a silent and solemn thing to get grown."

"Goodness mercy, yes!" Barsha granted, "but you don't need to let it eat into you."

And out of the next silence Dena moaned: "Ne'er a person in Glen Hazard has heard one thing about him since the man at Robbins' Gap and himself got tangled."

"Nothing there to get cumfluttered over," Barsha comforted. "Likely that was just a tale. Come he gets back he'll devyse how come it."

When Barsha said this, Dena looked out into the garden-piece again, and held her head lighter.

"Your bulb flowers is blossoming a sight in the world," she said.

Barsha made answer: "There's more things than

trees growing on these hills. Come we can't get the big things and their shade, we're proud to take the little flower-things and their sweetness."

When Rashe had come in from the far field, they took their piece of dinner together. There was cold food, for that the day was hot—pickles with the cold meat, and blackberry jam to slip the cold bread, and tall glasses of buttermilk all be-dewed. Barsha offered to cook up hot bread and some eggs, but Dena disowned being company.

Rashe bade Dena welcome, and after he had told the Lord to bless the food, they ate, and he talked now and then between great mouthfuls, asking about her farm, and if she wanted any store fertilizer to put on the stump field. He had a mort left over, he said, going perfectly to waste. It would be a charity in her to take and use it. Dena was well knowen that Rashe Lowe never bought a spare pound above his needs of anything, so she made gracious thanks, feeling near to crying with his fatherly care for her.

But directly Rashe had a different something to say: "Folks down at the store talking about that stranger, Burl Bracy. Seems he's got located at Sam Ewart's, helping build a new mill-shed."

Dena sat stiff and quiet listening to the sound of Rashe's hot temper cooking under his common words.

Barsha said: "Mean to say Sam Ewart has give him Waits's place, and Waits you might say barely out o' sight?"

Rashe let this go by. "Better some others mind

about giving him Waits's place," he said, louring at Dena. "Hit's unbecoming."

Dena wanted to cry out and tell him she was not to blame if the stranger haunted around, while this same Waits Lowe went kurling off leaving her free to each and every. But already Rashe had pushed back his chair and had gone over to the cracked glass on the wall to see about his hair parting on one side; and a person can't reason with a man's back shoulders.

Soon as he had gone forth, Barsha stirred around and set things away and washed dishes, while Dena dried them.

"There's times," Barsha said, "when a person's got more room to draw breath with the man out of the house."

After they were back by the door, Dena went on from where they were before dinner. "Hit might maybe be a wholesome notion to take one thing in place of another. I don't know."

In the clink of an eye Barsha was hard and stiff. Her eyes looked Dena up and down and showed sparks of light.

"Ever you put that new man out of Nowhere in Waits's place, you'll put you up a heap o' trouble. Supposing, for a sample, he is fair of face—well, fair face don't draw no water. Suppose his tongue is easy to slip words—fine talking never chopped wood."

Dena smoothed her hands together, one over the other, and her eyes were upon them while she told Barsha how the song had gone out of her heart when

Waits went away, and she wanted something to fill the hollow where it had been.

"Good land and bless the child!" Barsha cried out. "When the song's gone out of your heart you can't start another while the sound of the first is still ringing in your head! What you want with this man? Hit ain't treating a man right to use him to forget another you can't have. Hit just plain bodaciously ain't *fair!*"

Dena's eyes searched the garden-piece, but there was nothing there to say all this was not so. Her head knew it was so, but she was bound to tell her heart something to still its restlessness.

"What-all must I do with the hollow place in my life?"

"Take a piece of silence," Barsha told her, "and out of it will come either the old song again, or a new one, or maybe a psalm—after a while there might."

It was grown too dusk for Barsha to see her stitches, so she folded the old coat and laid it in her lap beneath her workworn hands, as if she might be saying a blessing on it, while she looked up to the top of Cragg Hill.

"Likely he'll come full circle," Barsha comforted both herself and Dena.

"What for should he do such a thing?"

Barsha sorted out words: "Every man that's got a rooted home-place is tied to it. Hit makes no matter how wide his steps rove, his heart swings around and that place draws him surely."

"What kind of school did you learn that in?" Dena asked, doubtful.

"Been seeing men start out in spring and come kurling back in fall all my days o' memory. A man soon gets wearied of doing what he wants, for that he finds it empty."

"Womenfolks got like cravings."

"Womenfolks," Barsha answered her, "never has chance enough to find it out. They're born craving what's not—and they die that way."

The sun was going down back of Lowes' cabin in a loud and screaming fury, frothing clouds out of his mouth and making a sight of himself to behold, but the two women did not see any color but a streak of red flashed onto a white cloud in the eastern sky. It faded out to pale violet.

Dena got up and moved down the pathway.

"I guess I'll be going on. There's stock to feed and supper to fix."

"Blessed be living!" Barsha said, "Many's the time I been that gramyed I didn't know which way to turn, and my reason's been saved alive by having supper to fix." She got up and put the coat aside tenderly, and came down the path with Dena so far as the gate.

Dena said: "Come on 'n' go home with me."

"No, not this night, kind thanks to you."

"What-all's that you got such a survigrous lot of?" Dena asked, pointing at the corner flower-bed all full of green plants.

"Old Maids, they's going to be—happen they get their mind set to blooming ere frost. I set 'em out too

late. I always favor growing a lot of them. They's a nice flower to have around."

Dena halfway laughed at herself, but had to turn her head away from the Old Maids, and Barsha wholly laughed at her, though with tenderness in her heart, when Dena asked, pointing at another bed, "What's all them?"

"Bachelor's buttons!" Barsha told her, and turned back to the house chuckling.

CHAPTER XVII

One day Waits would be set to start home, and the next his need to go on would best him, so he hung on at the farm, while Emery weighed down on the side of going forward since he was traveling cityward to see his sweetheart and craved company on the road.

Sometimes in the evenings the other men would stay around, and they would all sit along the top of the fence and speak each one for himself, not caring what the others said; or two would get in a fuss about nothing of any use, and quarrel a sight in the world, and forget it right now, just like old Homer Howard and Luther Bart back home. It took Waits a lot of practice to answer and talk, first one and then the other like outland—no time for a man to think betwixt his words—just all talk; no time to weigh out the worth of what was said, and as a consequence a heap of trash words were flung about. The air they used up was a scandal.

The men talked of big farming, and trucking and profits and the exchange; but none were content, for no one of them ever got all the share he craved. And Waits said: "Hit's out of reason to go into such ravelty ways so each can get a little bit. Back where I come from each farmstead grows its needs, and what is over is sold for a price and needful things bought therewith, and there's enough for all but the born

shiftless, and no complaining like a person hears on a big farm."

"That's all *you* know," they would tell him.

Such times they would plague Waits about being a mountain man, and even when he was jealous of showing his mad, they could tell by the way the color climbed into his face that they had stirred him.

One would say: "I don't see how you hill-billies can stand to live up on them bare peaks all your life." And another would put in: "That's what makes him so slow with his tongue—never seeing nobody to talk to. It makes 'em kinda dumb."

So Waits would be stung to say: "My hills is not lonesome peaks! They never stand away from each other in sulks the way your flat fields do. And they got trees to cover 'em—not near so bare-naked as your land. And they fold one into the other with safe valleys for home-places, and all are friendly-seeming with dwellings."

And he would look out over the fields, and such a lonesomeness would eat his heart that a man could scarcely stand it. If he only just had him a fiddle!

The bigness of the farm was a surprise. It was a town almost by itself, with a mort of cattle and many wide fields that raised as much crop as all the farms around Glen Hazard could fetch put together. And it took monstrous machinery to tend and gather the crop. The farmhouse was the head and front, but there were long barns besides, and tall round storehouses for fodder, and sheds for tools and wagons, and a place for the farmer's car and trucks, as well as

outlying home-places for the workmen. And most all the fences were wire woven in a square net and pulled tight. Waits saw cows milked by machines, which was a strange new thing, and a wonder, moreover, that the beasts were content to give milk that way. The engine and saw that cut up cord wood was like enough to Sam Ewart's old mill, except that this was fed gasoline in place of steam.

The farmer spent his time in an office-place with books, like a hairy spider in the center of his web; and only if a matter went agley would he dart out and see to it, and come back looking as if he might that minute have eaten up the cause of the trouble.

Waits kept talking "home," and Emery plagued him to venture outland yet further.

"This farm's enough outland to do me all my life. I don't have any fancy for these kind o' farms that's more like mill-factories; and the habits of the folks plumb distastes me." Waits scowled on the back of the farm owner who had gone by unnoticing of them. He never did pay them heed so much as a nod of the head when he passed by where Waits and Emery were working, and Waits was hurt in his pride, being always used to work for a man, and not just for the money he got off a job of work. But Emery's mind did not make anything of this.

"What's the kick?" he asked. "You're hired, and you do the work, and you get your wages. What more do you want?"

This was more than Waits could figure, so he left Emery unanswered.

"Times I think the inside of my head is on the downgo," he grumbled while he worked. He sawed off the end of a facer board as if its last hour had come. "N'er minute," he said, "and I'll throw down all this and go kurling to my home-place."

And the very day he had it in head to turn homeward and give up any city whatsoever, Emery held him back once more with tale of an auction that was being sold at a couple of farms down the pike.

"It's going to be 's afternoon," Emery said. "Let's get through by noon and maybe the boss will let us off."

When they got to the place, Waits saw that auctions down valley were very seemingly like any others, and he saw the same crowd of buggies and mules and cars all hitched together around the downgone farm-place till it was a surprise anybody could untwine them one from the other. The folks stood around where the salesman shouted the furniture by name, and bid half-dollars and dollars for whole rugs and things until it was a scandal.

Most things had gone by the time Waits and Emery got there, but Emery got so excited at seeing the last things bought that he bid him in a kitchen chair—what for, Waits could not tell, unless to start housekeeping for his girl.

Waits was about to go away, when last thing of all the salesman held up, and said, hopeless-like: "What'll anybody give for this handsome kimono violin?" So Waits turned at the yard gate and came thrusting back through the people who now were making homeward with their things. All he could think about was—there

was his fiddle; there it hung in the man's hand—supposing he should drop and break it before ever Waits could lay safe hands upon it! There it was, black-brown and glowing and with two strings broken and curling in the air.

Waits bid two dollars, and some mean farmer bid two and a half out of spite, and they went up, after that, dollar a time, and Waits had but the nubbin end of his week's wages, and when he had bid that out he gave over with a sob in his heart for his fiddle, for that he felt it his. And his heart was black at the farmer who would not know any choice between this and any other fiddle in the world. So Waits turned to push out from among the people that had gathered back around him, and they gave way for his savage look—the more eagerly that they thought he was on his way to do the farmer a hurt.

"Going—going—" the hammer was raised and ready to strike, when Emery yelled out, "Stop—wait—hey!" and held on to Waits, and turned him around and said: "Keep on, Bud, keep on, I'll loan you the difference."

So Waits slept that night in great peace, and like a child would have taken the fiddle to bed with him, but for fear of doing it hurt. And he stretched out a hand and stroked it, for he felt in his heart to it as to none other save Allardene Howard. And next day he sent after new strings, by one of the men going to town.

And he called the fiddle Venger.

It was usual with Waitstill Lowe to pay what he owed

and he had needed three dollars of his partner's money ere he out-bid for the fiddle; and that caused him to stay on a while. Now the turning time of the year had come, and when he had paid his debt, and laid by another week's wages, he told the farmer who hired him that he was bound to be moving on; and the man swore and said that it was just what he had expected of a wild man from the mountains; said, too, that Waits was the last of all mountain men ever he would hire. "They're too darned free to serve a man," he said. "Just when you learn 'em to drive a nail straight they ups with the idee to scatter along; and they are gone while you bat an eye. Truly it seems a mountain-bred man can't tie to a thing."

"Truly it is so," Waits told him.

Now Emery, seeing Waits break loose, took his turn to go off to the city; but he asked leave, as a man bound by wages should do; and he fixed on a time to come back, for he was a lowlander.

Since he had Venger, Waits had gone clean bereft. Work meant no more than if he had never heard such a word, and he was a scatterling again, with his heels twitching and all roads good.

From the farm he mailed a postal letter to Rashe and Barsha, telling them he was well; and to Dena he mailed a picture card, saying nothing that all Glen Hazard might not read.

And the farmer going down the road in his car that morning carried them some miles upon their way, quarreling at them the whole time for going from him, but willing to help what could not be changed.

When he turned his car from the pike road, they got down and made thanks, and went gaily forward, Emery and Waits and Venger.

THAT night the travelers slept in a useless barn in the far field of a farmstead. It was a tobacco barn, and smelled strong of it, for that the rain had leaked in from the roof upon the leftments. They lighted a candle stub, and ate some of the food they had brought with them from the farm, and they had some talk about tobacco, Emery saying it was dirty to chew, while Waits answered—silly to smoke, without so much as a thing to bite on, till each forgot what he began to say, and Waits unwrapped Venger from his rubber case and played sudden tunes that snapped off in the middle; and then all the broken pieces danced a new tune together, till Waits was wild and jumped up and capered on the dark, stained floor, and threw his body back and forth, chasing his great shadow that the candle made, till he was bound to give over and lay Venger down lest he do him a hurt.

"Do that way in the city," Emery droned from half-asleep in his corner, "and they'll trap you, and put you in a show for a wild man."

But Emery was all the way asleep before Waits got tired out dancing and flung himself sprawling on the floor.

Early day, while the earth was yet eastering out of the high shadows, they set them to the road again, going toward the city steadfastly. They walked themselves weary by noon and were glad enough to get a

ride upon a monstrous truck that was going by. The driver knew Emery from times he had been at the farm taking in garden stuff for the Exchange, so they two sat on the seat, and Waits got him up at the back, where, it seemed to him, were all the potatoes in the world.

He thought about the smooth road, and the big motor wagons that could carry in one trip the most of what Rashe could raise in a season back home, wondered him if there might maybe come profits out of these doings, as the farm hands had claimed. But he recalled that no man he had met had been contented with his share of the world's takings, since there were so many to strain the profits through. "Likely it's the same thing," he told himself. "Enough's all a man needs, wheresoever his lot be cast."

The truck stopped at the Exchange, and Waits puzzled to see it no more than a great warehouse. And they made their thanks and walked forward. And now they were at a high place, where they could see the city spread before them.

CHAPTER XVIII

FROM hitherward side the river they looked upon the great blot of smoke that marred the blue sky and the green fields around.

After long looking, Waits said: "Folks that live in bunches don't agree with my mind. They's perfectly unsightly."

"Go on home, then, why don't you?" Emery laughed at him; and for answer Waits moved quicker and soon they came among the first rows of outlying houses. They looked like play-houses, so little and white-painted, with a great sight of windows, with play-dolls and toy-things thrown in the yards as if the houses belonged to the children.

Waits took a notion to see inside such a place, so he hollered, and nobody giving answer he walked up the step and in at the door sooner than Emery could stop him. A woman who was in the forward room let out a scream like a train whistle when she saw Waits walking in, for that he seemed most scaresome in the low doorway, and by this time his clothes were neglectful and his hair longer than common. Waits backed out again, only staying to tell her: "Well, ma'am, I hollered, didn't I?" Then Emery came and dragged him down by his arm, and the woman stared through the window at them, her eyes scared wide open.

Waits grumbled, while Emery explained about knocking on doors in place of hollering; but it did not set with reason in Waits's head, so he left it alone. Especially as they now came upon a barber shop, where Emery said: "Let's get cleaned up and a haircut." Which they did, and the price was three quarters of a dollar, and Waits said it was a scandal, though truly his shoes had never been so bright, and his hair felt crisp and his body fresh. But after they had walked on a piece, he said to Emery: "I don't have any liking for the flavor of those people's soap; it's unnatural."

They went on in town, and ate a plate of beans and a strange-tasting piece of cake at an eating house and drank each a cup of coffee—and there went another quarter-dollar apiece, and Waits grumbled more; and Emery laughed and told him that was the way in the city.

Now Emery was very ready to seek out his girl, who worked in another eating place up in the main city, where costly people ate; but he was unminded to be seen in company with a rough mountain boy since he was in town, so the next thing was to rid himself of Waits. He found a houseful of rooms where he had used other times, and put their names down for one. When they came out, Emery went his way, saying first to Waits: "Can you find your way back here if I turn you loose in this city?" And Waits stood still and moved his eyes this way and that; and directly he said Yes, for that he had marked every building and post as it might have been a guide tree.

Emery being gone, Waits started along the street.

"Hit's long years since this was offered as free land," he told himself. "They've had time to get tickets up telling the names of all the roads." The more he went on the more he felt a question swelling in him, till it just had to be out, and he asked a citizen: "Where at can a man get to see this town?"

"You see it all around you."

"A man don't see a thing while it's biting his ears," Waits told him, his eyes being screwed up with the noise, and his nose wrinkled with the queer smells. "I want where I can get up and out, and see over, so I can study it out."

"Take a car to Green Park," the man told him, "and when you get to the water tower go up it, and from the platform at the top you will see the city all spread out below you."

"Kind thanks," said Waits; and he brogued along till he met a policeman, who pulled him back by his shoulder when he wanted to cross the road. Seeing him strange, the policeman devysed out to him about the lights and warning bells.

"Kind thanks," said Waits, "but dummered if I'd live in a place where I wasn't left to cross to the other side of the road when I've a mind to."

"Best thing you can do," the policeman said, "is to run home to your hills."

"How was he knowen I'm a mountain man?" Waits wondered, while he trod along the paving with a loose-kneed step. "These hard walks ain't got a bit o' spring to the feet."

He walked to Green Park as being simpler than

picking out which car might be going; and he was delicate of asking too many questions of the townsmen that went by, for fear this city would soon think he did not know a thing. It was a several miles' walk, and he went slowly, seeing unusual matters along the way, and the strangest was the wonder where all the citizens might be going in their best clothes in the middle of the week.

After a long enough time he found the park, and got him up into the tower, and from there he looked around and saw far below big bridges over the main river and lesser bridges over the creeks that fed into it.

"They've got it fixed so everybody in town can cross at one time if they're so minded," he said. "I don't see what holds up the middle of that longest one."

"That's the suspension bridge," a man told him.

"I thought it was," Waits said, not to seem unknowen; and the woman that was with the man laughed.

"Out of all manners, these townsfolk," Waits thought, when he felt his face and neck growing red under the woman's stare.

"Well, what do you think of our city?" the man asked, after all had stood looking a long time.

"There's a heap of it," Waits answered; "and up here, where you can't smell it, it's fine to look upon."

"Smell it!" the man said. "Why, our city's the cleanest—"

"Hordes o' folks living close together bound to smell," Waits told him; "and then there's cars and

engines, and smoke from mill-factories and boats—leave alone all the cooking smells. Ought to be a mile or more betwixt every house built, to let winds and rain keep a person clean. They smells down in Glen Hazard; and it ain't halfway as crowded as here."

The man looked as if he had a lot of words to say, but had made up his mind not to try it. While all rested silent, Waits noticed that the citizen was dressed in a townmade suit of clothes, and had on a fresh hat and a stand-up white collar and silk tie. All looked as if they grew naturally upon him, as if the man had been made to the right measure and his clothes were not uneasy. When a Glen Hazard man took to smart clothes the things sat on him like they did not agree with his shape.

After a while Waits said: "Fortunate thing somebody terraced off this town in layers, or it would be in the river right now. What river is that?"

"The Ohio."

"I've heard tell of that river all my life; in my history books in school, mostly, and some from my grandsir's grandsir that come down it one time on a liveable log raft. A useful river it is."

Directly he pointed to the reserve water, held by walls below. "Heap o' water prisoned-up there. I reckon that's for washing and such. Whereat does folks get drinking water?"

"From these reservoirs."

"You mean to tell me that all in this town drinks prisoned water out of tanks? Hit's a surprise they

don't die. One time when I was up at Massengale I drew me a drink of water out through a pipe and it tasted like made-up medicine."

"The system," said the man, letting loose proud words, "is a combination of the European method of slow sand filtration, with the American system of chemical removal of impurities, and the result is the destruction of over ninety-nine per cent of the bacteria."

Waits bethought him he must certainly find where the books were kept in this town, or he would be hearing more words than he knew the meaning of.

"I'll bet," he said, "that all that is what makes it taste like kept water." Then he recalled his manners, and went on: "But likely you can't help it."

The man and woman started to move off, while Waits said, "I admire your town and scenery; but I don't believe ever I could content myself to live friendly with it."

Waits stayed there till the going down of the sun; and when the sun lighted the sides of the tall white buildings, and the shadows were blue in the street canyons and a many-colored light flashed over the brown river, he told himself it was a sight to see, and worthy of the long run from the hills. When the sun was set, he made to go down, but the lights coming in the city below held his eyes. And the lights came out in bright lines—strings and strings of them flashing out all at one time, while Waits wondered and took joy in them. Then there were names written on the sky, and whirling wheels of fire, and lights like running snakes.

"Hit's a strange and powerful thing," he said, "for

mankind to make himself stars and planets, and furthermore to toss 'em around in such a mix-up. But it is a thing to joy in, the singing of so much brightness."

And when all the strings of light had woven a perfect net, he went down.

"Cities is properly a surprise," he told himself, while he trod once more easily along the bright ways. Now and again he stopped to stare in at the big store windows at shining furniture, or gems or women's clothes —better to be seen than in daytime's light; and he thought about taking a wagon-load back to Dena. Instead, he walked into a white marble place that said EAT HERE, and bought him pie and coffee, being hungry, and the girl that handed it to him was smit with laughing, but Waits was unknowen why.

It was harder than a man might have believed to unravel the way back to the rooming house. Signs looked different in the lights, and one sign that he had picked out to steer by kept flashing off into darkness and coming again when he had given it up. But he came at length to where there was a lamp post with one of its round lights broken off, and recalled that this was the place to take the side road. So he came to the house, and Emery not yet being come, he went up the stairs and into his room, where he petted Venger to see that none had been in the room and handled him since he was left lonely.

But he had played only half a tune when there came a pounding on the wall of the room from the yon side, and a voice said: "Lay off that row, can't you?" So he put Venger aside.

EARLY next morning Waits awoke, and would have gone forth, but none was stirring; so he lay there and wondered concerning the quietness where he had expected a great noise. In a place like this city surely there would be a great stirring when all the folks got them out of bed and set to work—which they properly ought to be doing before this. Waits grew restless and his legs twitched, so that when he could lie abed no longer he jumped out and pulled on his clothes, thinking perhaps a misadventure might have befallen the city. All the people therein could not have died in one night: it wasn't in reason; but he was uneasy enough to go and pull the sheet off Emery to see if he was yet alive, and got a curse straight in the eye for his trouble. Then Emery so far woke up as to say, "Don't forget about going out to supper at my girl's tonight. Come back here around five o'clock and we'll dress up some." And he was asleep again right now. Emery being safely himself, Waits sneaked downstairs and out.

He took Venger today for company, and also lest the man who hollered at the playing last night might come in and do him a hurt.

The sun was nearly up and sparrows were fussing in the roof of the house. It seemed they were the only kind of birds in this part of the world.

A girl something like the shape of Dena Howard, but not so delicate, was sweeping the porch.

"Give you good morning," Waits said.

"Give it back to you," the girl said; "you're an early one up, I'll say."

When Waits got so far as the broken lamp he felt at home with it, and set off to hunt him some food feeling not so strange as the day before. Stores were yet closed and a notion came into his head that maybe city folks did not eat breakfast, but got them out of bed late and started with dinner. But soon he found the same eating place as the forerunning night, and in it were young men and some boys eating as if they had not a minute to waste, flinging down their money and running out as if the sheriff were after them. "They properly ought to have got out of bed sooner, and then they'd have no use for such haste," Waits told the girl, "Give me a plate of eggs, and some coffee to drink."

He took his time eating, and when he came out the whole city had come altogether alive. Street-car bells were clanging and streaks of folk were running across the roads like black water. Fresh automobiles, shiny in the early sun, came splitting down the long streets, blowing horns and chasing folk as if they were bound to kill three apiece of people before they got to work.

If he had been alone, Waits would have jumped and run with the rest of the people, but this morning he held Venger, who had to be cherished. So he set himself to wait until things stopped stirring so fast, and stood where he was on a sidewalk corner. The people passing looked at the mountain man, standing so still while crowds broke around him, like a rock in midstream. They looked at Venger, too, who was like a fiddle despite his wrappings.

Directly a fat little man was flung straight onto Waits and when he had bounced off he grunted, "Why can't you get out of the way?"

"Where to?" Waits said, pleasant, and smiling wide at the little man. But the fat man had been shoved off down stream before he could answer this, and one who heard laughed out, "That's good!—'Where to' —that's good!" And his laughter being unpleasing, Waits moved on, crossing with the next run of people after the bell had sounded.

Next thing he saw, in the middle of the road, was a metal figure of a man on horseback, riding off into the air; and the horse's legs, Waits noticed, were queer-set, so that if they'd belonged on a live horse they would have dropped off when he moved.

Then he stood at the crossing of two wide streets and stared for long enough up at the Court House, for that it seemed to be a very heavy building. And many people were wrecked upon him till he got altogether tired of them.

"The thing we'd best be doing," Waits told Venger, after they had been knocked this way and that for an uneasy time, "is to find where the books is kept, and then get started home again. These hard roads don't pleasure my feet any."

"Hey!" he hollered at a man passing, and the man hopped like a rabbit and then stopped still and a mort of people waited to see what was the cause.

"Where do you keep your books?" Waits wanted to know.

"What's the big idea—shouting at a man like that,"

the citizen answered him, beginning to move himself gently along again. "You had me scared; I thought somebody'd been run over."

"Where do you keep books in this town?" Waits said again, patient, and moving along the way the man went.

"Where do I do *what?*"

"Keep all your books," Waits said again, lamenting the mischance that he'd picked a citizen with lacking sense.

"I'm not a bookkeeper," the man told him, willing, but sorely puzzled to gather the meaning.

"Look you here," Waits said, holding the man by one arm. "Hark now—*where is all the books in this town kept at?*"

"Oh," the man said. "Oho! Ha! What you want is a bookstore." By now he had turned friendly-seeming, and he took himself and Waits to the edge of the sidewalk where they were clear of the passing crowds.

"Would I be called on to *buy* a book there?" Waits broke in, wary.

"*Now* what are you trying to say?"

"All I aim is to see all the books there are and pick out some to carry home. I'm seeking book-learning."

The citizen studied Waits for a long minute. "The Public Library is the place for you, young man," he said. "But you mustn't carry off books from there. You take a look around, and if you see what you want you can borrow it for two weeks; or you can go out and buy a copy at the bookstore—see?"

"Kind thanks," said Waits. "Where at's this place?"

"Go up here," the man said, "till you get to High Street, then walk up High till you get to Sixth Street crossing it. Keep on till you see a big building that says 'Library' over the door.—Can you read?"

"Of course," said Waits, "how else should I have took the craving for more books?"

"Pardon!" the man smiled at him. "Well, it's between Sixth and Seventh on High. You can't miss it—"

"Come go with me," Waits said.

To the citizen this was a surprise, but he only said: "I'm late to work now—I must rush on."

"Their haste is a strange thing," Waits thought while he trod along the streets. "A strange thing, for it gets them there no faster." None passed him as he swung along, seemingly slow and easy, yet on all sides people boiled and bubbled and broke out into trots and spurts of running.

CHAPTER XIX

THE Library being found, after some asking and a mort of walking, Waits entered head-high, but holding Venger most dangerous tight for company. The big hall was empty and hollow, but for a counter and a lamp on the far side.

Waits went up and said to the lady behind the counter, "Where at's the books?"

She smiled friendly at him, and asked what kind of books he was seeking, and he stood there and told her all his need. Then she rang a bell and a boy came, and to him she said: "Take this gentleman and show him over the Library."

"Yes'm," the boy said, while he stared at Waits and Venger—"Come on!"

The boy scorned him, unknowen that a hill man in rough clothes and strangely earnest could have need of books. And scorning him, the boy took extra care to use long words telling what kind of books each room held. He took Waits into room after room full of books, talking all the time. But Waits paid no heed, for already he was feeling books.

They were around him like prison walls—No! not like that, for that he felt drowning in them—waves and waves coming over him like maybe an ocean-sea of books. In every one uncounted words must be

crowded together, words shut against each other in the dark of the pages, each word telling of something strange. Waits drew a breath of soft air that tasted gey curious, and plunged into yet another room that the boy called "Fiction"—whatever that thing might be. There were some people walking softly, searching books, and boys pushing trucks of books that they unloaded into empty spaces on the shelves; and some men with polished hair and a woman with a peaceful face were sitting by the long, shiny tables, reading.

In this room the lines of books were no longer all black and brown and gold, but had bright covers of many colors—red, green, purple, with gold letters, or white labels with the name printed. And where the sun from the high windows came upon them the colors played the notes like music. Venger twitched under Waits's arm, asking to play the tune he saw in these colored books, but everywhere, except in the big front hall, there were little framed pictures of the word SILENCE. Funny silence, Waits thought, with the books making such a clamoring.

"How many you got in this place?" he asked the boy, while they crossed the hall to yet another room. And the boy answered, proud as if he owned every one, "Over half a million—"

"Books, I mean to say," Waits told him, "not stars."

"Over half a million," the boy kept on, glib as habit had taught him, "and a thousand magazines on file and over one hundred newspapers, and we have the largest collection of books for the blind anywhere in the country."

"What might they be?" Waits puzzled. "Blind people can't read." He knew that to be a hard fact—take Preacher Virge Howard's wife, for a sample.

"Come on!" the boy said, noticing that Waits stood there absent in his mind. "Or you can sit down if you want to. I've got to go."

Waits did not move. "Suppose I took a notion," he started to say—then hushed his voice, while the reading people looked up and noticed him. He went on speaking very low and smoothly, in a voice quieter than a whisper, "Gin I took a notion, now, to write me a book my ownself—is any person allowed to write a book?"

The boy looked puzzled. "Why, I guess so," he said. "Come on!"

Together they went upstairs in the great building—long easy stairs growing up each side from the hall like natural things. And up there were more books. Just as if there were not too many already in the big rooms below, here were shelves of books set either side of little pathways; and the narrow piece of floor betwixt the books was made of thick glass, and light from down stairs shone up through the floor, so that it was like walking on water. Waits's feet went creepy lest he sink down.

Now the boy had given over talking, save two or three times he said, "Come on!" when Waits lingered.

Above and below and on either hand were books. And Waits noticed what a peaceful thing is the hushing of the city sounds. Up here the noise was no more than forest trees weaving and whispering, and the sound

of far waterfalls. The books soaked up all the harsh noises from without and poured them forth again softly in a rustling sigh.

"Come on!" the boy said.

And up higher there were more books. Waits followed the boy and they climbed up a twist of iron stairs that were wrapped around a stone post, and the stairs were like a ladder that had made a mistake and thought itself a corkscrew. Up at the top were narrow cages all filled with books, and some heaped on the floor, the shelves being over-full.

"Here are the books for the blind," the boy told him; and showed big, clumsy ones, with thick pages and raised marks on them, the way Ranson Gillow's Notary seal raised the paper when he marked it. Waits rubbed a finger along a line, and understood how a man might learn to feel words with his fingers, and hoped he would never need to, and gave thanks for his own eyes' good seeing.

The boy put the thick book back, and he said: "Come on!" as if he was growing mightily wearied of this man.

"Whether it be by sight of the eyes, or by fingers' touch," Waits said slowly, "a book only gives up its meaning to him that has a fellowly feeling. Books are a person's lives and thoughts, and a man's got to feel that other life while he reads the words."

"Uh-huh," the boy said. "Come on!"

Back downstairs in yet another room—the biggest of all—Waits stuck once more and stood still, drawing long breaths of strange smells. Then his eyes were

lightened, for down at the far end of the room, full in a band of sunlight, there rested, proud and lovely, an upright stand of paper books. Their covers, full-fronted and glowing, shouted to him. And they were green and orange-colored and red; and some had bright pictures, and others were glistening white with big black words marching on them; and all were joyous and more singing than the bright books in yon room. And they were a sight to behold. Yet Waits was knowen while he looked that it was too great a thing for his yearning heart, and from craving all the books in the world he fell sheer to the need to win free. He joyed in, yet feared them, like a man beaten too far from a safe shore by strong waves. And directly the feeling came over him that he was bound to get clear. Back far away in his home-place he might edzact it all out in his head.

The boy shifted about and Waits wanted to slap him like a fly or whatever. Instead, he brought himself to follow and together they came back in the big hall where the lady was, and Waits felt himself swimming over the white marble floor—waves of books beating on him from every side, so that he held on to the counter, while he asked of the lady his question: "Could anybody write a book?"

She smiled at him and said: "Yes—anybody that has the gift of writing. But it is like painting and music: you have to know how, and to learn the rules."

"Thought maybe a man had to take out a license to do it."

The lady laughed and said that would be a good idea.

After that he let go of the counter and made his thanks, and would have gone away, but the lady said: "Would you like to borrow a book or stay and read here?" The look in her eyes showed Waits that she found him curious and foreign, but she was gentle and fere.

"Kind thanks," Waits said, "but I'm bound to be getting on. It would not be in reason to carry off such a mort of books; and I am disabled of choosing me one single book, being unknowen *which*."

His head was queer with the smell of many books together, and he felt himself washed out of the wide front door—waves of books pushing him forth. He walked as if he had been hit in the head but had not yet fallen over, and back of him he heard the lady's voice say to the boy, "Well, really! the people that come into a Library!"

"Yeah," said the boy.

By now it was middle day, and downtown the city was quivering and jumping with the heat. Street-car tracks glittered and flashed in the sun, and the hot sidewalk burned Waits's feet, and the tarred roadway bubbled like cooking sorghum.

Waits pulled off his coat, and stood, in his slack trousers and blue shirt, drawing hard breaths, while he looked up and down Main Street. The citizens crept along slow-like, their haste of early morning dried out of them, and they thrust at each other for

places near the store-fronts where there might be a slice of shade.

"Couldn't have done prouder efn they'd set out to build 'em a bake-oven from the start," Waits said.

He was feeling limp in the bones, owing to the hotness, and to the strange food of these past weeks, and to the shock of all those books that yet made his head 'spin 'round.

"Best eat me some dinner, next thing." The smell of food came out from a kitchen-place below the street, and pulled him that way. But the white shining front of the place, and the little unnatural trees at the door and the spread of food in the show-window looked costly to him. Besides, the place was full of folks already, so he brogued along and turned toward the river, hunting a more homesome-looking place.

There was not a store among all those he passed that was like Ranson Gillow's, and Waits thought it a pity, and wondered that the stores did not keep some of everything the way they did back home.

Directly he came to a counter without any store to it, set outright on the pavement, with a silver tank of drink that smelled coffee. Here Waits bought him a sandwich of ground-up fresh meat, and a cup of coffee, and, since the price was fair, he took a second helping and began to feel stronger. But the pity was he also felt hotter. Just when he was going to turn away, a man next to him called out: "Blueberry pie à la mode!" And Waits, watching to see what that might be, saw the man get a piece of flat pie with ice-cream melting into it, and he declared he would have some,

too, even if it did look like poison. "As well die eating as just melt away," he told the citizen, but the man only stared back at him and went on chewing pie.

Going up another street, Waits went in and out of all manner of stores, and it was a surprise that the people who ran them expected him to buy. Ranson Gillow's was free to run in and out of without a man's being pestered, and so were the stores up at Massengale and over at Sunview. All Waits wanted was to see the insides of the stores; and see them he did, taking his time, while some of the store-tenders laughed and others danced around trying to shoo him out.

Late afternoon he met Emery and they went out in a street-car to where small houses spread all ways across the edge of town, like strings of tangled white ribbon. It was in the street-car that Waits first suspected that that berry and cream pie was, after all, poison.

"A man's food don't set without enough clean air and steady work with it," he groaned to Emery. "Efn this car don't directly stop weaving and jerking . . ."

"We're about there," Emery comforted. "We'll get out next stop, if you'd ruther, and walk the rest."

Waits bucked out, and stood doubtful on the street corner for a while. Directly he moved softly on, with the look of one who hopes more than he believes. "I et piley-mode for dinner," he told Emery, and his friend agreed that it does not always set during hot weather.

Emery did not make any trouble about being seen privately with Waits, though he backed out of walking

the city streets with him. Already he had explained about Waits to his girl, and told her his friend was a nice boy, though crude and rough. "You know how these mountain people are," he had told her, "but he's worked at our place for a while, and I'm free to say I like him well enough." So, on her bidding, he was taking Waits to supper with the girl and her folks.

The man of the house put down his newspaper when the boys came in. He took his spectacles from his fat little nose, and sleeked his three strands of hair over his round white head. Then he shook hands, softly and moistly, and said: "Hey! Emery, hey! hey! Here we are again! How's-a boy? Hey? Pleast meetcha, Mister. Well, I guess you country boys feel mighty smart being in the city again. Our little town's growing —yes, sir—hey! hey!" He took up his paper, put back his glasses, and ruffled the hairs, and they heard from him no more.

Waits was tormented with food at supper, with things forever handed to him that he couldn't get away with, more especially as he yet had a misery inside him; but he saw it was their kind of manners, so he took or refused graciously.

Waits thought the women, Emery's girl and her mother, were dressed too fussy, and laughed too much. Especially Emery's girl, who had skirts on her like twelve years old, though pretty legs undoubtedly. He hoped Dena Howard would never paint her face, or if she did it would be red and not that queer orange color. The girl's black hair was glued on her head like it might maybe have been black paint. It was shiny,

and went properly with her kind of looks, but it did not have the clean look of being washed and blowing free like Dena's. Waits had to own the girl was pretty-favored, especially such times as she opened her big dark eyes at Emery and Waits, and when she snapped them as she laughed.

After supper all sat around stiff and puzzled what to say, and a little hired girl cleared off the dishes, since Emery's girl said what was the use of having a night off if you had to wait table at home?

Being asked questions about his home-place, Waits answered with manners, and after a while began to tell them stories of the mountain country, making up as he went along. And they believed him in all he told. Waits knew the stories not true, but never bethought him to 'ware them, since everybody was knowen stories are not true and never meant to be.

Then they asked him graciously, did they see a violin when he came in?—and Waits had to own to Venger. Then would he play? And he drew back, saying he scarcely knew how—and not feeling that any live tune could open up in this tight room. Most likely Venger would choke. But since they urged he went into the hallway and brought in Venger, who was in a sulks; and they scratched out some tunes, he and Venger both feeling a mite sick.

The people made the usual thanks, and then all grew so stiff again that Waits bethought him that he was wasting Emery's evening with his girl, and he withdrew himself, saying he would find his way to the street-car and get on back to town.

And seeing a car pull off and leave him just when he came in sight, he took out Venger to play him something till another should come. And the thought of the books came over him again, and the shock hurt as if he had been rolled on by a boulder, and he felt crushed down till he could not move—till Venger told him that words were no matter! Words were no matter with all the soft lilting sounds of life to be drawn when he needed from that one wooden box. "Books ain't a thing but words, hard words," he said; and leaning his head down on Venger, he let himself be comforted.

The tune trickled across the night, and moaned a little like the windshake in a tree. And a policeman came out of the darkness and told Waits to quit that noise, and then walked on into further darkness.

CHAPTER XX

"EITHER I get me a job in this town, or start home," Waits told Emery next morning, while he turned out what money he had. "And I don't know which."

"The boss won't take you back this time of the year," Emery warned, thinking about his own job, "so it's no use counting on stopping off at our farm. Got enough to do you all the way home?"

"First place," Waits grumbled, parting his heavy hair before the washstand mirror, "first place, I can't content my mind I want to go yet. Second place, no, I've not got the money." He threw his comb at Emery and said: "Get up, or dinner'll be spoiled."

Emery grunted and wriggled down for more sleep. "It's not six o'clock yet, you hill-raised goat. Why don't you try down at the railroad shops for work, if you've got to go out already?"

Waits went down and he passed the girl on the porch, sweeping as if she had never left off since yesterday.

"Hallo!" she said.

"Same," said Waits. "Where at do I find the railroad shops?"

"Don't know," she answered him. "Ask up on Main Street. You hunting work?"

"Maybe yes; maybe no."

He stayed leaning against the porch post. She was mightily like Dena; not in the face so much, but in the way she had of going on and getting done with the work that lay to her hand.

"Come on and walk so far as the corner with me," Waits asked to see what she would say.

"Deliver me!" the girl said. "Six o'clock in the morning—walking! What do you think I am? Get along now; I got this porch to sweep."

While he kept on up the street, Waits thought, "Perfectly like Dena! Hit's a scandal I'm shummicking around here in place of being back home. There's that girl working here, and Dena keeping on at her work, and Emery with a job to go back to—only me . . . !" He stopped square in front of a hastening citizen, and the man ran hard against him.

Waits said: "Where at's the railroad shops?"

The man dodged around him and ran on without saying a thing—just scowled and went.

"Point-blank mannerless," Waits complained. "Wonder me should I go up or down this street"

By the time he had eaten some breakfast, the city was stirred up again and soon he found a man to tell him the shops were down the street. So Waits started up, well knowen that was wrong, but feeling in himself that he had no fellowship with work this bright morning. Maybe it was Venger under his arm, but his head was eager to see more sights and new things. So he went up, but in fairness he told Venger, "You 'n' me both worthless losels—that's what you 'n' me is."

All the time he was going along, people were run-

ning in a stream downtown, emptying out of the dwelling-places on the far high side of town. "The shifting of these folks is a surprise," Waits said; "weaving this way and that the day long, and even standing still they sling their hands and heads around. Wonder me did they ever hear such a word as rest."

By the time he got among the liveable houses, the streets there were empty, all but some delivery wagons, and now and then a shining big car with some cleverly dressed women in it.

Directly on a long street, Waits saw the biggest house in the world set in a garden-piece of flowers. Grass was cut close as a piece of cloth, and a man could walk everywhere upon it, though there were walkways threading it in even curves that led from unknowen gates, and all ending up at the big stone steps by the front door.

The door was broad and white, with the top half of a round window over it, and there were big white pillars nearly as tall as telephone poles holding up a roof shelter over the front porch. The body of the house was made of red bricks, but they had gone many-colored with long years of weather; and ivy-vines climbed all about the house, so it seemed a human thing and a likely place for folks to live. Waits thought almost he might content himself to live in such a house if the devil doomed him to dwell in any city. The shadows from its outlying parts fell in quiet patches on the grass, and there was no ugliness in any part whatsoever.

"Hit's got more chimneys than anybody could in

reason have fire hearths for," Waits thought; "but they grow most naturally out of the roof corners. And the big bright windows is a sight, and likely they take a power of sunlight withindoors."

There were other houses on this same street looking as if they might be useful for human dwellings if that was the best city people could do, but Waits cherished always the thought of this one city house, for it stood proud and lonely.

Waits hitched Venger close up under his arm. "You 'n' me best be turning homeward," he said, like home might be maybe a step around the corner. "There's too much of this place for you and me, and it's all worn down alike—take for a sample this miles of one street we walked up and now got to walk down again. Hit's not like hills—hills have got separateness. Come on home!"

So they went down, and passed through streets where the houses were built all joined together like a wall, which Waits thought was ugly and unhealthy besides.

It was noon of the day already and time to eat again, but Waits vowed no more blue pie and cream. He found a place to get a glass of buttermilk and a bowl of stewed meat, and when he came out he wondered him where next, for now he was neglectful of railroad shops or any work whatsoever.

He asked a man who was selling papers on a street corner, where he might find more air to breathe, and the man told him in the park and pointed the way. This was a lesser park than the one high up over the

city, and being surrounded with city there were not any great things to be seen from it. But directly while he strayed, Waits came upon the figure of a man like unto himself and carved in dark metal. The man's clothes were careless and he held himself natural, unknowen what to do with his hands, like any common living man. And Waits saw that this was Mr. Lincoln, and he was well pleased and stayed a long while by him. So these two mountain men and Venger rested quietly for a space of time; and when Waits had looked to see there was none to forbid, he took out Venger and played a short, urgent tune to pleasure Mr. Lincoln. Then he went his way, first taking off his limp hat, and bidding farewell, because the figure, for all it was like common, called forth his gracious manners. Waits had almost said: "Come on and go home with me,"—but that was out of reason.

Now he considered in his head that he might as well go and have a look at the railroad shops; and his head and his feet at last agreeing he quickly found the way.

But hitherward of the shops by a long piece was the depot, with two or three trains at one time steaming in it. And Waits turned and went within, for so large a place just for trains was a strange thing. There were enough waiting rooms to puzzle the head, all full of benches and restless people; and there were stores selling papers and ice cream and toy-things set all around inside the station; and the places where tickets were given out looked like the bank up at Massengale,

with its shiny barred windows and many ticket agents, each one in his own separate cage.

Waits thought he might get him a job selling tickets, but one of the caged men said "No." And Waits asked him, "Do you ever feel like you were in jail?"

"Yes," the man told him, "when I have time to think of it. You get on."

That was twice today Waits had been told to get on, and he thought it was out of all manners; or it might be a habit with those that live in cities. It was in reason, come to edzact it out—Get On! Either you did so, or you got stepped into or shoved in spite of all. So Waits drew himself up tall, and loped strongly out toward where all the trains were hissing, and the people in the waiting room fairly fell out of his way.

Then a surprise came. Waits saw a man in conductor's clothes, and knew him for the conductor on No. 6 that ran every morning through Glen Hazard. Now the man was a homemade citizen of Glen Hazard before ever he got to be train conductor; and he had got himself a wife up at Massengale and had him a home-place up there now; but Waits thought likely he would recall him to memory, more especially as Waits had shuttled up to Massengale and back on No. 6 one or two times.

He hollered to the man: "Hi-yar! Jim Foster!" And the man stopped and looked at him and knew him.

"What you doing up here in this part of the country, Waits Lowe?" For all he was a conductor and used trains as a habit he was not set up, but hit Waits

a great blow on the shoulder and said he was proud to see him.

"How come *you* up here, come to that?" Waits answered him. "Got you a job on another train?"

"Why no," Foster told him, "I'm still on old No. 6."

"How come you are?"

"Well, she ends up here, don't she? This is where she stops. Then she goes back."

"Great forever!" Waits cried. "Hit never come into my fool head that No. 6 ever went and stopped any place! She just had the habit of coming through every morning from the south. Now I come to edzact it out in my mind, it's in reason there'd not be a fresh train every day!"

Foster laughed master at the mazed look on Waits's face, till folks that were going by lingered to hear what was; and Waits stood and watched Foster get over his laugh. There was puzzlement back of his eyes and the wrinkle that stood betwixt them was deep.

"How come No. 6 gets both ways *in time?*" he asked, and Foster laughed again till he had to take off his hat and wipe his face and head. "A-waugh!" he guggled; "a-waugh—ugh-uh! Why man, it don't take more than a day for the whole trip!"

"You mean to tell me I could step on No. 6 here in this place and be delivered at Glen Hazard by this same night?"

"Why yes, of course."

"Hit took me a mort o' weeks to walk out," Waits said slowly, "a mort o' weeks; and I could get back right now. Funny!"

When Waits had told of his coming outland, and of some of the ventures that had befallen him, Jim Foster gave news of Glen Hazard, and told a tale of Fayre Jones and a town boy having a spill of temper on the platform and nearly falling beneath the wheels of No. 6, all owing to some girl's name being wrongly spoken.

"Bess Howard, I believe it was—or Dena," Foster said. "We pulled out then, but from what I learned next day, there's a good-looking foreigner come out of Robbins' Gap and taken up work at Sam Ewart's. He's a trouble-maker, some say, and one of the town boys undertook to give out to each and every how this Howard girl had been acting unwise and careless with him. Fayre Jones properly fed his words back to him. Those Howard girls are gentle women."

"What like is this stranger?"

"Never seen him, but there's talk of his being well-favored and red-headed, and—"

"What's the price of a ticket from here home?" Waits broke in. "I got no time to lose."

"Seven dollars and sixty-two cents."

Waits counted out what money he had, and gave it to Foster. "Here it is—short fifteen cents that I'll owe you till I can get a loan of it off Ranson Gillow. Where's No. 6 now?"

"Come on with me," Foster said. "We're due to leave in ten minutes. You may as well buy a regular ticket."

WHEN he was on the train, Waits cradled Venger on his knee, and considered it was a pity his bundle of coat

and clean shirt had to be left—but what could a man do?

While the train got into open country, Waits grew sleepy with the swaying and the click-click-clickety-clack the wheels made.

Surely he had taken himself by a surprise being on this train. It was not the place he had meant to be when he set out that morning. But a man can't keep on his way while a red-headed foreigner is meddling with his rightful girl. It was a pity he would never get so far as to view the ocean-sea.

"Heap o' things is a sadness in this world," he thought. "Seems a man's bound to buy whatever he gets with the price of some other thing he loses. One thing mostly contents my mind—happen all the things I set out to find was overcoming as books, I'm best in my home-place, before I get struck curious."

"There's this"—he stroked Venger—"and there's Dena—and there's a ripe chance of a quarrel, being that man's yet cootering around. I got me a lifeful of doings ahead. I wonder me will Emery get a surprise at me being gone home!"

CHAPTER XXI

"Hot night! Hot night!" Dena Howard said, when she came out from the house after supper and sat down upon the steps where Bess was already idling. "Seems the last hot days in fall is worse than summer. Hit's unnatural."

The sun had gone down like an orange into the purple hills, and after a while the purple turned gray and many heavy clouds came and fastened themselves tight to the edge of the earth.

"The day's been thick as you could wish," Bess said.

They sat still as rocks hoping for a breath of air, but the evening was so heavy they could scarcely think it was alive.

Dena said: "There's a star come out, looking as cool as need be, and sits up there watching us being hot. Funny about a hot night; they's mostly all alike. . . . After that star there comes a moth fluttering around. and a bat slants out o' the trees, and there's toads in the yard wherever you step, come out looking for dew to drink."

They were quiet for a long while, and then Dena went on: "And the lightning plays skip-'n'-go-fetch-it; and everything's as still, saving now 'n' then a pine tree'll kind o' sigh. Pine trees is a sight nervous that way—they'll twitch without any kind o' breeze at all. I

hope to the Mercy Seat it don't rain ere I get the last fodder pulled."

"Pray against it, why don't you?" Bess asked her, when the sound of the meeting-house bell came tapping through the trees—clink-tang! clink-tang!

"Time to be shifting on efn we aim to get to meeting," Dena said while she got off the steps. "You never can tell about prayer. Take for a sample you pray hard enough that the pest'll be cleared outen the corn, likely as not they'll be killed by a storm o' hail and the corn, too. Some ways the Lord *don't* seem to have right good judgment, look at it how you may."

They took the path that surrounded the Bald, and started to get to the meeting house—not the one on Cragg Hill, but the oldsome barn that used to be Big Gully School.

"Don't you any more believe in praying, Dena?"

Dena waited a time before answering, and then tried to put off her sister with a story. "Happen you recall the big preacher down from Massengale? How he come in the hottest dry spell we'd had in memory, and all asked him to pray for rain; and he done so; and it come down such a onding it was fair fitten for laughter; and more than that, all the crops was floating away and as a consequence ruined, and all said,—'That's what comes of trusting the prayer to a town-fetched preacher that's got no experience of farming.'"

"But, Dena—don't you?" Bess was put about for her sister's salvation and was not beguiled by a story.

Dena's answer was strained through the hot night: "How am I knowen what I do or don't? You may,

likely, since you fail of using your mind one way or the other; but a person that tries to study things out gets all mazed till they plain don't know."

"But, Dena . . ."

"Now you hush."

"But, Dena . . ."

"Heish! didn't I tell you? Here comes somebody along back of us."

Burl Bracy must have been handy to them before they were 'ware, for he entered talk saying to Bess: "Hit's unfitten to leave your mind stray upwards overmuch. The world we live in is wild enough."

"Leave off poisoning the child," Dena told him.

"You've no call to talk out o' manners," Bracy said. "If I was that mean, would I be walking to church house to hear preaching?"

"You're a shame, you are."

"What talk!" Bracy complained. "Must be the hot night cooking your temper." Directly he said: "First leaf fell today—I see it drop."

"And the shadows lengthen."

They walked on, and he talked of himself and his skill and power in all that he undertook, for the time was come to hasten matters betwixt them, and Dena should know what a fine-strong man she was wasting.

Fayre Jones came up with them, and when he had greeted all, he hung back with Bess. When she saw Fayre and Bess together, Dena felt worn down and lonesome till she was well-nigh content to marry and go away with any man. And Dena wondered her if she

took up with Bracy she might get Waits put out of her head.

"I'll do all a man can to pleasure you, Dena," Bracy said, when the others were out of ears' length. "I'm a free and making man, and our house'll be fixed any fashion you should want."

"And where at will such a house be—saving in your head?"

"Ary place far piece from here."

She looked around on a suddenty and moved out of reach when he was about to lay a hand on her.

"Seems all men set on a far-away place," she said. "Restless forever, that's what men's like." And here came Waits Lowe into her head not to be denied.

"All is," Bracy kept on, "I aim to go where is good pasturings. Over somewheres yonder of Robbins' Gap where I was raised, there's lands full o' meat for crop stuff."

It chased a shadow across Dena's mind—"Over beyond Robbins' Gap." There was a thing Fayre Jones had said about a mountain man yet not homemade, that time of Waits's rippit. But she looked again at this Burl Bracy who wished to be her man.

"Sorry use ary man talking about owning me the while he uses with raw corn the way you do."

"I'd not need to wasn't I all-alonesome," he pleaded. "Never I do it save when a strangeness comes in my head. Such times I get that catawampus that even the drink horror is better. You'd maybe keep me from strangeness; you fit me like a pair o' shoes."

She went her way, head high, but slowly, to let

Fayre and Bess come up with them before they should get in sight of the church house.

"Only difference," she told him, "I don't aim to be walked on."

They had not gone more than a rod's length further, when Bracy jumped from the path like a grasshopper.

"Been snake-bit?" Dena asked, keeping on her way. And Bess was taken with laughing, and Fayre said: "Look at what is scares the brave man!" and he pointed to a house cat, straying back to its home farm, the way it went slinking under the bushes.

Bracy came back, covering his shame with much talk. "I got a terrible dread o' beasts, more especially cat-beasts, owing to my mother marking me afore I was born. She was all but overtook by a catamount riding home one night about that time, and . . ."

Dena walked on unheeding, and Bracy took trouble to stay close by her side. "So I been took with terrors of suchlike all my days. Efn ever I was to meet up with a mountain lion I'd die of plain scare."

"Which would be a pity," Dena granted. "You're full o' news this night. Don't ever you find a thing to talk of but yourownself?"

They came now into the clearing by the church house, where all who had no affairs of their own to tend took notice that Bracy was walking with Dena Howard.

THERE were empty wagons under the trees, the horses unhitched and turned into the woods to find themselves late greenness. A dim yellow light shone from

the church-house windows upon the tree boles at the edge of the clearing, and in a pool of lamplight by the open door the womenfolk were standing in soft talk together, and children heavy with sleep held by the women's skirts. In the shadowed part on the far side the men sat in a row on the fence, calling the roll of who was come to meeting and who was neglectful.

One cried out: "How come you here, Dite Morgan? Who-all's minding your still that it don't bust loose and blow up the Dark Corners?"

Dite Morgan growled; and another called back from the shadows: "Shouldn't wonder but Cajah Dobbs can tend to that!" And all laughed master.

And when the bell gave its last warning, all went within.

The inside of the church house was only benches and a platform and a table to hold the Bible; and little oil lamps hung slanting on the walls. In the heart of the church sat the women with babies in arms, and the little children that walked restless up and down and crawled under the benches at some play-game till they fell asleep on the floor, or sprawled in the laps of such women as had no young of their own to cosset. And the boys were thick upon the front seats, but even in meeting the hot night worked in them and caused mischief. They punched and slapped and shoved, and held in their laughter till it burst from them in a shout; and their whispering was like driven leaves in a fall storm. And the men were at the back, so they could look on or sleep as chance happened to them.

It was a good thing to hear Virgil Howard preach,

and saving a few survigrous losels already over-ripe for hell, the young men came equally with the old, and the children with the grandsirs, and the mothers and the young girls, and all who heard him would be comforted.

Bess and Fayre went in to a mid-seat, and Dena near them yet alone, while Burl Bracy lingered on the outer steps so he could stray off should the words of the preacher discontent his ears. Furthermore, Dena had cast him from her when she entered the door, for to sit in meeting with a man was the same as being promised to him before all eyes.

Now there came the purring of the first hymn, a long-drawn sadness leaking out across the hot night, a murmur of speaking parts, and a breaking out of the chant again.

And the people being gathered together, Virgil Howard stood before them and cried the words of Ezekiel the Prophet: "Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord!" And the people hushed, and the boys gave over their rough playing, and turned to him.

The preacher's white hair looked more like wings than commonly, and the blue, steadfast eyes shining from his work-lined face looked upon them, and he was lifted up till he stood over above his people like a special man of God. He stood before them, still, with folded hands, and his strong voice carried the stream of his words across the church house and out into the clearing beyond.

"My text tonight is taken from the Book Ec-

clesiastes, the eleventh chapter, and verses seven to twelve; and part of chapter seven that seems also fitten: *Sweet is the light. It is good to the eyes to see the shining of the sun. Rejoice young men in your youth! Let thy heart cheer thee; let care go from your mind, for youth is but a passing breath and the spring of life only vanity. The days in which no pleasure is draw nigh, and the rain clouds appear, to turn the sun's light to darkness. Great is the trouble that is to come.*

"I am not going to speak to you tonight of evils and terrors and the wrath to come. There is more in life than all its ills and cares—why, all the New Testament is full of life 'n' living, and death itself is only the way to a new life. There's been such a power o' preaching about sin 'n' evil we got our minds over-full thinking upon it; and then we're more than likely to sin some more. Now I'm telling you to quit brooding over how evil you are and start making up your mind how *good* you are. No danger you'll neglect to be sinful—that'll come; but you keep thinking, 'I'm a good man—I'm a child of God.' Rejoice in the sweetness of that light and you'll be strong 'n' healthy to stand firm in the days in which no pleasure is. We've had warning a-plenty about Hell Fire, and God knows we're liable enough to fall into it; but the word of the Lord is of goodness and comfort."

One of the young men upon the outdoor steps cried out: "How about the Old Testament, brother Howard? How about warnings 'n' the Wrath of God?"

"You'll find a heap o' that," Virge told him, "and it don't seem to have done you any great good. But

you'll find this, also, in the forty-fourth chapter of Isaiah in the twenty-first verse:

> "Sing, O ye Heavens, and be joyful O earth;
> Break forth into singing, O ye Mountains!
> O Forest and every tree therein,—
> For the Lord hath comforted His people
> And will have compassion upon his afflicted!"

With his love for natural song, the Preacher gave full way to the proud words, showing forth their loveliness, as holding some rare and precious thing before his people. Almost they could see him hold the promise before them in his shapely, outstretched hands, as they heard him offering it to them with his voice.

"And somewhere else it goes on: *He hath made everything beautiful in its time; also He hath set the world in their heart.* (That means hearts like yours, Dite Morgan.)

"That's what Moses calls 'the precious things of the everlasting hills'; and us living here in the everlasting hills ought to feel like we could sing with the forest and all the trees therein."

"Seems to me there had properly ought to be some warning 'n' threatenings," Dite Morgan grumbled from a back seat where he had been drawn in off the steps to hear the music of the words.

"Ain't your religion got ary scare whatsoever to it?" one of the front-seat boys asked, and the Preacher said: "Now you boys stop asking me questions. If I'm going to get this sermon preached, I'll have to get on. You all come back here Friday night at seven o'clock, and I won't talk about nothing but damnation if that

suits you. Tonight my subject is sweetness 'n' light 'n' that's what I aim to talk about.

"Now there's no call for you to forget what you owe to the Lord. When I say be happy 'n' think on good things, I'm not meaning be neglectful. The sacrifice made for you on the Cross don't leave you be forgetting. Never should we let a gift be made without return, howsoever free the gift from the maker."

The hot night air came through the windows carrying a smell of withered grass, and Dena was all but sleeping with the heaviness of it and the smooth lilt of Preacher Howard's words—"Be happy 'n' think on good things." She was far from that. It was not an hour past that she was thinking about going with Burl Bracy only to get rid of sorrow. How did a person be happy? Easy for Virge to preach! But she watched his face in the yellow flicker of the smoky oil lamp that stood on the table. He had had his share of life and its heaviness—and still talked about being good and happy. Must be it could be come at someway. And his voice went on:

"Rejoice in your youth! I'm telling you that youth's the time to be good in, because then you've got the health 'n' strength 'n' backbone to put into being good; then, when time comes for your strength to fail, you'll already have taken a set in the right way. Hit's no more 'n' reasonable, if you cramp up your minds studying about sin 'n' evil, come you get old 'n' weak you'll take to doing the things you've been warned about. Heap o' the sins we're warned about never would have got into our heads any other way. Why, I don't reckon

there's a boy in this meeting house tonight bright enough in his head to think up half the sins that he can find out from reading the Bible."

"You telling us to quit Bible reading?" Dite Morgan called out.

"Surely not," Virge answered him. "Keep on reading the Bible all the time; hit's got a heap o' good sense in it,—only, when you come the sins, just you say, 'This don't concern me, I ain't aiming to do such a thing'—and skip over that part.

"Getting back where I was—don't any of you fret overmuch about punishment and the wrath to come. You do exactly what I tell you and there won't be a thing to punish and consequently no wrath. And I tell you to rejoice in your youth and keep thinking about being good children of God and sing and give thanks. Let's sing right now—Hymn number two-seventy-nine: *Loving kindness, loving kindness, loving kindness, O how strong!*"

And while they were singing there came a noise of sobbing through the church, and Dena looked and saw the girl who was Ranson Gillow's eldest—a shame-chastened woman, who had since taken religion. She sat in a far corner muching her child. There was a great shawl over her sleek hair, and it fell around her shoulders and over the child—in the misted glow a sad and kindly sight. Dena went to her and took the child and gave a gentle word to the mother; and with the word she was healed of all notion of going with Bracy, for she bethought her she would not willingly bear children to such as he.

They came out into the yard where was much talk and laughter, and Dena gave back the child and stood bemused till Bracy loomed up near, waiting to walk home; and she came to herself wondering how to be rid of him without making a stir that would call notice. And Virgil Howard that minute coming out of the door she went to him, saying: "Rest at our house this night, Cousin Virge. The old man will be proud, and it will pleasure me 'n' Bess heartily."

Virgil looked down at her and thought about one or two things, more especially the man who stood near, waiting for Dena. He could not recall where he had seen him, but the man was an uneasy sight, standing there in the murky shaft of lamplight that fell from the doorway.

And now Dite Morgan had untied the preacher's white horse, and came over with him, and Virgil thanked him graciously, bearing no ill-will for Dite's antics in sermon time. And being about to get upon the horse, he noticed that Dena kept close beside him, and he then agreed to what she asked, saying: "Kind thanks, I'd as well as not."

"Happen we may go along together?" Dena said.

So the preacher gave his horse to Fayre Jones to lead, saying Bess might ride if minded, which made her skip like six years old and cry out when Fayre made excuse to lift her on the horse before all the people. And they went into the woods road, Virgil Howard and Dena, and Fayre leading the tall white horse with Bess perched upon it and holding the saddle horn with both hands.

For a time they went on without words; then Virgil looked upon Dena and said: "Allardene—tell me."

And Dena told him how she had it in head to perhaps go with Burl Bracy, being he snared her in despite of herself; and how weariness of the summer had eaten her down till her heart was drumly dark.

"I recall him now," Virgil said, "the very day he come to Glen Hazard; and the crawling feeling he gives a person's backbone. I'd as lief have dealings with a copperhead snake."

"Hit's the queer look in his eyes witches a person."

"That only spells he's brainsick. Wouldn't be surprising didn't he go strange. What's gone with Waits Lowe that you was all but pledged to?"

And when they had gone forward of Bess and Fayre, he said again: "Allardene—tell me."

And Dena then told all, from the day of Waitstill's going to the present night. Virgil made no answer, but took her trouble to himself gently, and lifted it from her loneliness, as a strong man makes no matter of a great weight, so that it seems light. And they were fere together, for Dena felt the lifting and was comforted.

Soon the four of them came to the home-place, and found Homer in his chair by the doorway, grown fretted with watching for their long coming, and full of a piece of news.

"Bart's just been over a while back," he said, "and he tells where Waits Lowe's suspected of being back home."

CHAPTER XXII

THE stars were bright gold on the black sky when Waitstill and Venger got out of the train that slowed for them at Glen Hazard. And the train went its way screaming through the low gap southward.

Waits was two-minded about going up home or saving that till morning. In his outland run he had a habit of sleeping where he chanced, but it seemed simple to do so with his own bed handy. But the stars filled all the air with a brightness that yet did not show light, and there was a livingness about night in the home mountains, with all wrapped safe and the stars watching over. Venger wanted to stay out and talk about it, but the time was not fitten; and Waits knew where was a good place for sleeping in Newt Beechy's hither field down by the creek, and he walked thitherward, and thought about the stars. Different ones they were to when he started out last spring. Up there now was the Hunter, chasing the Seven Sisters; and the Lost Ell 'n' Yard were hunting for the morning, which spells cold nights will be along directly and the woods beasts will move into holes for the winter. And there hung Job's Coffin—cold nights, and the Coffin! Mostly stars are the cheerfulest things but times when too many of them are out a person feels uneasy with all that hanging over his head.

He came to the field and found him a sheltered corner and there he laid him down already wondering about being home; and by the place where he lay he could hear cow-beasts cropping and chewing but could not see them. And soon thereafter he slept, till day came to look over the hill's edge.

And Wait-Still-on-the-Lord took his way homeward with the first morning light and climbed Cragg Hill, and soon looked down upon his home-place, thinking himself curious ever to have left it, for it was most desirous. The slant field behind the cabin showed as a purple patch where it had been turned under for its winter sleep, and already the cabin lay waiting for winter among the gray and blue shadows of the folded spurs. A big wind was coming into the hollows and it tossed the smoke from the chimney in handfuls. From the rising above the drumly path Waits now saw the three least Gillows chasing along to their own house. Seemed they had been plaguing Barsha's hens, because he now heard Barsha's voice sailing through the dawn, carried in the clean, new wind:

"Do so again and you'll sup sorrow with the spoon of grief—meddling little pests—as if chicken-birds weren't born to trouble like the rest of us, without you hurling clods 'n' rocks fit to lame 'em flat to the ground.—Outen yourself ere I lay a sudden hand upon you!"

She had turned indoors by the time Waits crossed White Oak and came to the gate and hollered. And when she came to the door to answer—Rashe being already gone afield—there stood her son leaning on a

post and doing his mightiest to look lorn and woeful.

"Can you spare me some food, ma'am?" he whined like any trifling go-about.

Without any crack of smile or frown, Barsha looked him over. "Don't know yet if you're worth it," she said.

"Where's the old man?"

"He's around."

"I'd best be making me out the way till you 'ware him."

"Pstah! He's same as always was, or worse; and did ever he pay you what was owing your evil?"

They stood watching one another, each mortally afraid of the softness that threatened in their eyes. Till directly Barsha said: "Think you about coming in the house?—or did I take all the trouble to raise a idiot?"

She went quickly within, and back by the fireside she had to sit down, since her knees were weak and her inside queer, and her head empty save for words knocking loose inside it, like marbles rolling around: "Waits is back! Waits is back! Waits is back!" So she sat her down and held on to the edge of the chair, having no mind to fall over in despite of herself and in a manner show the world she was old as she felt herself to be.

Soon as he got into the room Waits went to her, there where she sat calm and looking in the fire, and having let go her chair so her hands lay free in her lap. He looked down at her, and after standing there long

enough, he said: "Hi, Mumps!" just the way he used long ever ago when he came in from playing in the yard.

Barsha wrinkled her forehead at him, looking to see was he tall as usual, and if he had been eating enough good food all this time away, and what clothes he had left on him, and wondering what was the bundle he carried that looked more like a fiddle than it did clean shirts. And directly she said:

"Your shoes is dirty. Go clean up afore you come tramping my floors. Why can't you act nice?"

He laughed and laid down Venger on the bed, and flung out of the door in a split second, and was gone galloping over the fields to seek his father. And Barsha rose up and went out to the kitchen hole to see what she could fix for his special breakfast. There she found Rashe, that had slipped in the back way meantime and was washing his hands and face like he didn't know enough to leave off.

"Well, he's back," Rashe grumbled.

"Yes, he's back," Barsha owned, while she bent over the potato basket to keep her gladness from getting the best of her.

"Surely and undoubtedly he's back!" Rashe nearly shouted and then hid his face in the towel.

Waits now came in from his chase all scant of breath and brought up against the edge of the back door. "You might have told a person you weren't there!" he complained at his father, and Rashe said: "Hurry up the food, Barsha, afore this savage eats the first person he meets up with."

It was a silent meal, with three people at peace once more, and the world going on smoothly without a heart-worry in it.

And now the wind, with a great rushing, tore at the tree-thick slopes and came booming down the draught. From far off sounded snapping and tearing of branches and ever again a hollow crash. When the wind hit Lowes' cabin with the flat of its hand the place trembled and shook.

"There's fall in that wind," Barsha said. "Hear the house creak!"

" 'Twould take a powerfuller storm than this to overturn it," Rashe told her. "I'll thank you to pass the eggs."

Barsha said to Waits: "Seems like you ain't altered any to amount to much."

"What for should he?" Rashe wanted to know; "the Lowes' tribe is nothing save themselves. Gin I'd had fear o' strange sights making him full o' new notions, he'd never have been let gone."

Waits got up from the table and brogued around the room. "Strange things I seen," he told them, "but mostly they had no reason nor sense to them. Gin a man's liable to be set catawampus by new notions he'd best go blind 'n' deaf. I am me, is all."

And when he had found all in house in no way different to the way he left it and felt of his three black books in the corner, he said: "Believe I'll roam down to Sam's and see what's to do."

Barsha opened her mouth, but Rashe scowled it shut for her, and when Waits had gone from the house,

he told her: "Waits is no foreigner, and he's a full-breeded boy. Leave him go his way unwrapped with mothering. I'll promise that red-headed Bracy don't eat him up without a bone sticks in his gullet."

ALREADY there were more leaves fallen here than down valley, and this morning's wind was whirling them thickly from the trees. When Waits had climbed the fence by Gillow's spring, and gained the high road above Cragg Hill, he shuffled through the leaf drifts joyfully, feeling them tickle at his ankle bones. He trod on fallen twigs and laughed to hear them snap and crackle beneath his shoes.

"The winds of heaven are come to clear up the earth's trash ere winter hardens; but I'll no more be like a leaf blown in the gale. I been trash long enough!" A gust tweaked off his hat and Waits went racing after and came up with it just the instant it was minded to start down into Glen Hazard. He stood at the same spot where he had peered down in distaste that spring night he left it, and he drew his breath again and his eyes were filled with the homely place. There was nothing curious about it. He felt it like resting all his bones to see again the many-colored light upon the hills and taste the blue smoke that wreathed from the chimneys that were set a clean distance one from the other. Crowded and tight it seemed in spring, but since that time he had seen a great city and now was glad of the little houses hung separate upon the slopes. He breathed deep of the taintless air and moved downward eagerly to the place he knew.

And there stood No. 6, steaming in the station, back already, and Waits knew all about how it got there. It seemed a most fellowly thing. Not a person in Glen Hazard knew about his riding home on it, and to Waits the secret was funny.

When he got down to Gillow's store at mail-gathering, he stirred in with the rest, and the citizens called "Hi, Waits Lowe!" And Waits called back, "Hi!" and thought never had he seen folks that agreed with him like these did.

Fayre Jones was so taken aback to see him that he stared to make sure if this might be his true friend. And he was so well content he all but said so, flat out. And Waits ran from the store and Fayre after him, bearing the Company's mail in a brown cloth bag; and when they were out of sight of all others they capered together on the wide open road.

"I'm bound to Sam's to take up my job of work."

"Reckon I may as well follow along a piece and show you where at his new place is," Fayre complained; and when they had gone a mile or two or such a matter, he said: "I'd best turn back with these mail goods."

So Waits went contented upon his way to Sam Ewart's, and it was a day without any warning in it.

Aunt Matt saw him coming from afar down the road, and let go the dinner chicken she had been at great trouble to catch and ran to tell Sam; and Sam that had been dreading this day all summer looked out of his eye-corners at Burl Bracy and told Aunt Matt to go withindoors and keep house.

Sam Ewart's new homestead and mill site was so altogether liken the one he had left that but for having to search for it up an earlier roadway it might have been the same. Being it was a different place it must be what Sam meant to say by profiting himself. All he had got better than his last place, so far as Waits could see, was a flatter piece of land for the mill, and a horse-high, hog-tight fence. There was the same-looking little gray dwelling house with a ruinous barn beyond it and a nest of lesser out-buildings leaning this way and that betwixt. Down the yard the new mill-shed, yet only half roofed, gleamed yellow in the morning's sun, and the hearty wind whirled chips and shavings about over the yard. Messed-up pieces of iron stuff that were fragments of the mill engine lay around, and the big round saws were yet packed up in boards.

The name of Waits Lowe held no trouble for Burl Bracy, but no sooner did he see that dark and busy man come in at the gate than he dropped his hammer and stood still as a telephone pole. Waits came on till he stood near him, but seemingly unknowen. And he said to Sam: "What piece of work's next to do?"

Sam opened his mouth, but no words came right away. Then he blew his white moustache out straight and said: "Might maybe I could use two men for a while, maybe I might." And watched to see which of them would jump on him first.

But they were busy taking hold of the old distaste and cared not a bird's tooth for Sam. He no more than gave them a place to hate in. Standing face to

face they were the unlikenest men in the world. Bracy limber and fair and mean-looking as he was goodly of face; Waits lithe and dark and in as ugly a temper as he need be, though a proper and a shapely boy. Bracy thinking of the whipping he had taken from this savage that was yet unpaid—and the debt had been growing all summer; Waits thinking about Dena, and no wonder if this snake had coiled around her with his fair looks. And around both of them crept the old ugliness that had set them at odds from the first.

Each was bent on staying where he was until the other gave way, so Sam's hope that they would set to and fight and get it over was not granted.

Two hours they stayed there, steadfast, measuring one the other, and turning over their quarrel without any words, while Sam sat on a log and wondered him what use his wages were; and at twelve o'clock Aunt Matt's voice came from the back door of the house.

"Come on get your dinner!" she called.

After dinner Sam gave out a job of work to each and they went on with redding the new sawmill out of the heap of trash leftments from the old one. And no more happenings took place, saving a great show of manners like: "I'd thank you for the loan of that saw, Mist' Bracy," and "Spare me a length o' that sheeting, Mist' Lowe."

And between them Sam sat on a log and worried his white moustache, and studied a piece of plan-drawing, and Aunt Matt in the house doorway worked at a square of quilting and looked sober as a coffin-lid.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE next day was Sunday and Waits took Venger and went kurling off up towards Howards' Place bent on seeing Dena and contenting himself all was straight betwixt them. Fayre Jones companied with him, and told there were tales in Glen Hazard of Dena's friendly goings-on with Burl Bracy. All the world knew that Bracy had haunted up at Howards' since his first day; Uncle Shannon Budd claimed he had known of them on Big Wolf Bald one day not a month after Waits had been gone; and a mort of times they had been seen walking together; and the last news they were at Wednesday night's meeting.

"All these things I ain't bound to take as so," Waits said.

"Our townsmen got faults, but ain't especially liars," Fayre told him.

"Hit's unliken Dena to be turned around by a smooth-spoken go-about," Waits mourned. "She'd not ought to heed him."

"Then why ever not tell her to cease making town talk?"

"I got no right nor claim to tell her ary thing."

"Since how long not?"

"Since last front o' the year—time I thought myself all was. Never I should have left her till we were

fast wed, or pledged—one. She'll rightly put blame on me."

Fayre Jones drew a sigh from deep within his lank frame and fixed his blue eyes on a far-off hill. "Women," he said, this being his time to be wise, "women don't ever blame a man, gin they love him. They'll first claim the whole world's run offen its tracks so as to make him in the right. All Allardene Howard wants is you to be home."

"I ain't scarcely worth it," Waits said; but when Fayre so far forgot himself that he agreed—"You surely ain't!"—Waits took time to upset him in a thorn bush.

They had now come to Big Gully Hill graveyard, where Fayre sat down on the fence to pull one or two thorns out, and Waits helped, since he had not been meaning him any harm. And Venger was leaning against the fence. And while they lingered, Burl Bracy strode by them, out of all likeness in a blue suit of store-boughten clothes and a new gray hat perched on one side of his head.

"Hi!" he called to them. "On my way up to see my girl."

Waits jumped for him, but Fayre's long arm was quick enough to drag him back, and Bracy went undamaged on his way, while he called back over his shoulder: "I'll tell her you'll be along directly, come you take time to wash yourself and put on fittener clothes.—Take them shoes for a sample. . . ." But when Fayre looked like changing his mind about holding Waits, Bracy gave over, and went on.

Fayre told Waits: "Never you muss his fine-pretty clothes. Leave the dad-burned buzzard flap awhile. Efn you ain't the temperest man! Set down top o' this fence 'n' cool off."

Waits said several matters.

"Quit giving forth words like that and spoiling the air of a fine Sunday."

"Efn you'd not stopped me . . ."

"Yes, sir, surely. That's why I done so. Now you hark, the while I drive some wits into your head."

Waits climbed on the fence and sat sulky. "I can stand a mort o' weariness being there's reason back of it."

"A-law!" Fayre said, "whenever'd you hear me talk ary thing save sense?"

" 'Twould take all day to tell such times," Waits answered him. "Get on with your wiseness, whilst I sleep." And he pulled his hat down close over his eyes.

Fayre stood up in front of him and began like making a speech: "Them that chases kites falls over straws and likely breaks their neck. . . ."

"Wise word 'n' useless."

"Talk out o' manners with me again and I'll in no wise help you out," Fayre threatened. "Hark now! Being you feather into that stinking purp without any out 'n' out reason back o' you, you're lost, no matter should you skin him wholesale. But get you a fact against him and ram it down his gullet, and all Glen Hazard will be joyful to watch him choke."

"Where'd you reckon I'll lay hold on such a fact?"

Waits shoved back his hat and looked around like facts might be sprouting on the handy bushes.

"That's for you to find out," Fayre told him. "But never you so much as think about jumping that trash till you do, or you're liable to be so ashamed you'll have to wear your face other side out evermore."

"You know a heap," Waits told him. "Hand me up that fiddle. Hit's got more sense than you ever will have."

"Ain't you aiming to go on up to Dena's 'n' act nice?"

"Surely that's far from my head," Waits said, "I don't aim to crawl in second place where that—that . . ."

"That town-fetched gentleman?" Fayre helped.

"Uh-huh!—him—is already at home there."

Fayre opened his large mouth and let out a laugh that ranged over the hills. "Great 'n' blessed forever!" he said, "you ain't changed a inch by your outland run!"

"Never did aim to be aught but just me," Waits quarreled at him. "Leave that noise 'n' hand up Venger."

Venger was mad, too, for he quarreled and screamed and made a tune fit for green devils to dance to; but directly he sobered down and eased into a moaning like a far wind on a fall night; and then he forgot it was a Sunday and played ballad tunes. And Fayre looked from Waits to Venger lost in a wonderment. And Venger yet crooned while they walked home-

wards, and Fayre said slowly: "He surely was worthy of a long outland run."

And Waits said: "True words! All I got outland I brought back in this box, and ne'er thing else touched nor spoiled me."

WAITSTILL LOWE had come home in all haste by the aid of train No. 6 to pluck Burl Bracy from the way of Dena Howard, and yet he could not get at it. The talk that Fayre Jones had told worked grievously in his head while he sawed and hammered down at Sam's place the week thereafter. For it is one thing to claim not caring, and yet another to walk daily among matters that do not explain themselves. He was ashamed to ask of Dena flat out from Rashe and Barsha, dreading to hear maybe Bracy had taken his place; so he held off. Bracy was all uneager to start another rippit if he might get his way without it, so he made talk and set it afloat in town how Waits Lowe was most altogether scared and could in no manner care for his promised woman.

And as if the air was not poisoned enough already, there now came Uncle Shannon Budd in the matter of the first week, to watch how the new mill was growing and to say it looked to him liable to fall down. Now Uncle Shannon was in the manner of being a walking newspaper, bearing fresh scandal every day, and not being overly troubled to get matters straight before telling a tale to each and every. And he sat him down on a pile of stripping at the end of the yard where

Waits was working and plagued him world without end to know what was, till Waits was nearabout distract' and promised Uncle Shannon to chip his tongue with the axe did he not give over.

"A-law! A-law! that's outen all manners," Uncle Shannon complained, "and me setting here as peaceful as a dead tree."

"Little more 'n' you'll be dead without any mistake," Waits threatened him. "You'll best be loosing yourself and leave me admire your back shoulders."

"They tells," Uncle Shannon said, while he cut a fresh chew from a black hunk of tobacco, "they tells how this red-headed losel's got you scared, the way you keep on working side by side of him all unliken yourself, and him free of your girl."

"Gin ye dar' to soil her name!" Waits 'wared him; and Uncle Shannon shifted to other news.

"He's been using liquor heavy since you got back. And when his brain's afloat, the way he slings Dena Howard's name around town would . . ." The old man stopped as Waits flung his way with axe in hand; and he started talking again when he saw that the axe was going to be used only to trim up a wedge. "What I aimed to say was, the corn he uses must 'a' been growed in hell. One time I took his offer of a drink, 'n' the top o' my head like to fell off. 'Twarn't more'n a dram o' popskull either of the three or four times I tried it—me favoring a taste for good corn —but I'm telling you that afore I fell over I was drunk as a banjer. Hit was the quickest ever I got

drunk; and he gone 'n' left me all wrapped up in the briar patch that happened to 'a' caught me; and, like I started to say, that's the kind o' blockade he's using, and so I 'ware you, Waits Lowe. Doc Peters says where Bracy's the kind that goes plumb outgate his senses such times as he's in drink. Me, I don't do more 'n get sleepy-like, but the Lord made all folks different."

Waits went on with his work, while Uncle Shannon kept putting at him. "Whyn't you name your quarrel 'n' be right at it? Times I was a young feller none cared to pick on ary one o' my girls, or they'd get a broken nose for keepsake. All talk down at store is —what's Waits Lowe shaping at? How long's he aim to be shamed this way?"

"None o' their affairs."

" 'Tis so. Leave me carry 'em word that you'll be after him and they'll all quit being in a state o' mind."

"Efn you ain't the bangdest old man," Waits said. "Go fry your whiskers!"

"I'm setting here," Uncle Shannon told him, "and right here I aim to set till you give a name to your quarrel 'n' word to carry."

And now Waits's temper broke down with a great noise:

"Carry word 'n' get you gone!" he shouted. "Carry word that he makes my gun trigger to itch, and it'll snap one o' these times when he's standing at the other end of the bullet."

Uncle Shannon had hooked bigger fish than he had baited for and he sat mazed a sharp time before he

trailed himself away from there, with the story growing in him at every step.

When Waits shouted out, Bracy stopped work to listen. Quietly he eased over to where Sam sat on a log and stared, thinking the hour had struck.

Bracy said: "Happen you heard a threat given?"

"Hey?"

"You're a witness to his gunning for me," Bracy said, and smiled down at Sam's uneasiness. "And I'll call you to own to it. That's no more 'n playing fair, Mist' Ewart."

"No names was passed."

"Which is same as owning you heard," Bracy told him, and laughed to see Sam taken wordless. He took a long drink from his pocket bottle and drifted back to work. And Sam went over to quarrel at Waits. "Efn you don't quit acting like a unwholesome fool," Sam said, "this mill's liable to stick unfinished evermore."

"A pity," Waits said. "Move off from me."

DURING the following days the work at Sam Ewart's went forward without any new accident, and Sam was uneasied by the sight of a double wages bill. He complained to Aunt Matt and she only said he would have to bear it as well as might be.

"Efn you're scared they'll kill each other on your properties, whyn't you send off that foreigner?"

"Easy words!" Sam answered her. "Only didn't Dite Morgan 'ware me how this same trash being sent off a job o' work over at the Gap, the placed burned down the next night following, and how would that be?"

Sam shared out work in such manner as to get the men as far from each other as yard's length allowed, and spent his own time rocking to and fro betwixt them, which was a hindrance, and as a consequence the work went slowly. But after a matter of a week or a little over they were ready to put power in the mill.

On the day they sat at dinner without any words till Sam said: "Efn ary person wanted to change his job—there's Uncle Shannon Budd is raising him a new house against winter come. Since he took to measuring his corn in gallons 'stead o' bushels he's doing proudly."

" 'Tain't much more 'n the bones of a house he's got now," Waits agreed, but made no word of leaving the mill.

Bracy went on eating his dinner, or playing with it, since he didn't favor food overmuch; and directly Aunt Matt came in with a special deep pie of fruit leavings. Aunt Matt rightly thought that good food was the healer of most quarrels.

"Hit's the silkiest day," she said, while she served the pie, "warmed up like summer gin the morning's early frost went off."

Waits said: "October makes me think o' cats that way. He'll show his white teeth, just a little mite on a frosty morning; and then come noontide he's warm 'n' sleek as a person cares to touch; and he creeps along like a cat about to catch it a bird, and last thing he gives a great leap out o' sunshine into cold, misty clouds. October is sleek to the touch, but he'll bite you soon as nothing—especially the gray-color days, when

he goes along snarling at the wind 'n' stalking winter."

Bracy got up to go, and Aunt Matt called him to know why he never finished eating his pie, but he went on unheeding and Waits saw Aunt Matt's mouth shut tight on words that manners would not let her say.

"Best pie ever you made, Aunt Matt," Waits comforted. "Give me a second piece, please ma'am. Never you fret over his acting that way. He'll as well finish his meal out of that bottle he's all time using at. Furthermore, cats don't agree with him, so Fayre Jones tells, which as a consequence keeps me talking of them."

"I declare, you're a shame, Waits Lowe; but I can't help but wish a sizeable cat or whatever would walk off with him 'n' have done."

She started to clear the dishes, and Waits said: "For a woman as gentle as you are, Aunt Matt, you got the ripest notions! Want I should play you a tune by Venger?"

"Hit would pleasure me a heap should you care to."

" 'Tain't scarcely worth harkening to," he made excuse, "but the notion come over me you'd like to hear him." And before he began to play he told her: "All that I brought back from my outland run is nested in this fiddle-box."

And Aunt Matt saw in his eyes all that Venger was to him, but all she said was: "Watch out Dena Howard ain't envious of it."

And Waits played one tune and another till Sam

came back in from the yard to say that was not what his wages were paid for.

The upright boiler for the engine was standing on its skids ready to be lifted onto the fire-box walls; and when the ropes were slung around, and the hoist made fast to the rafters beneath the open shed roof, it was only needed to heft it into place and start piping up the engine so it would run. Waits was out of all patience with the knots in the frayed old rope, but Sam Ewart said he would be fried in axle grease ere he'd pay for new lifting gear for one lone last job. "Where's the sense," he said, "of having new rope for a quarter-hour's job o' work, and then lay it aside to rot?"

After long enough time they got it tied here and there; and the boiler might have been a human being for its stubbornness. Directly it came loose and swung in the air, and Sam and Bracy shoved it over to bed square on a block, while Waits hauled on the hoist and shouted to them to hasten ere his arms loosed from his shoulders. It lacked only a pair of inches or such a matter from being bedded, when the main tie-rope pulled loose in its middle, and while Waits fell over on his back, the boiler tilted down sideways, and mashed Bracy's left-hand foot betwixt it and the block.

"Hit's a surprise," Waits said, "that all town don't come running to see what is, with all that hollering. I was satisfied that rope was sorry for such a piece of work."

"My foot's broke!" Bracy roared out, "and your

neck'll be the same, Waits Lowe, gin I can walk so far as to get at you!"

Nothing would content him but Waits let the rope part itself of a purpose to ruin him, and while Sam gave a shoulder to crutch him into the house, he made the air perfectly unseemly with all he said.

In the house Aunt Matt ran for the liniment she kept for rubbing on accidents, and sent Sam kurling off to seek Doc Peters, the while Bracy moaned and cursed. And Waits stayed out in the yard studying how best to balance up that boiler.

Aunt Matt set water to hotten, and the time she was in the kitchen Bracy was alone in the forward room, and there being none to benefit by his moaning he quit and stared around. And from looking through the window and seeing Waits standing ansund and gay by the shed, he looked back to the table where lay Venger. And being he could not get at Waits to destroy him, Bracy took the next best way, and reached over for Venger, and broke out the bridge, and tore loose the strings, and laid the woeful, barren fiddle-box on the floor to mash his sound foot on it and crush it—when Aunt Matt came back in and let out a scream fit to wake the sleeping hills.

Waits came over the yard at a speed to shame a jackrabbit, thinking fire or murder or maybe both; and by that time Aunt Matt was on the floor, hovering Venger, and saying to Burl Bracy things that Sam himself could not have bettered.

And when Waits saw Venger in that shape, the blood drained out of his face, and he turned a green-

white under his dark skin, and came down on Bracy and said:

"Death grip you, Burl Bracy! Outen yourself from here! Get you up 'n' run, no matter is your foot broke off short—leave this place, afore I shame myself by lighting into a cripple!"

Bracy was stretched back in the armchair, and was busy moaning again, but Waits's eyes shrank to black, gleaming points, and he came at him in such wise that Bracy was glad to be scarce of the chair, and he moved through the doorway as best he could. Waits set his hands deep in his pockets to keep them from hastening Bracy; and Bracy hopped and howled and dragged himself only a few more inches before he turned around and threatened law on the account that Waits had aimed to end his life with an engine boiler.

"And gin the law's too slow, I'll be laying out for you till I pin you to a tree bole," he yelled. And he put up both hands to his head as if it was strange with the sound of rushing blood.

Waits came to him where he stood and his dark face was thrust close to Bracy's frenzied eyes. "See you!" Waits roared, "and harken, you woman-snatching, thieving trash—leave out from here lessen you want I should knap you in two parts! Outen!"

Now Waits had gathered Venger from where he was cradled helpless in Aunt Matt's arms, and said such a thing that Bracy's foot was cured so he ran like a weasel and was lost to sight. And a short while thereafter Sam and Doc Peters came in up the back road.

"Where at's he?" asked Sam of Aunt Matt.

"Cured," Aunt Matt said, taken with the shakes now all was past; " 'twarn't more 'n a set o' skinned toes—I could tell by the put-on fuss. He ran glib for a ruin-footed one."

Waits searched out the broken strings and found the bridge under the table, and the stick where it lay fallen, and he made no word; but Doc Peters, who was more used to horseback than to running in haste, loosed hold of his temper. All out of breath, he said to Sam: "I'll thank you for my fee just the same, Sam Ewart, the way you've wasted my time 'n' legs with tale of a bad hurt."

"By rights," Sam grumbled, "no patient, no pay." But he handed Doc Peters a five dollar bill, it not being the doc's mistake. And Doc Peters cursed him and gave it back, and took himself away. From the gate he called back: "In your place, Sam, I'd keep that man scarce of using around hereafter. He's the kind to go raving crazy gin his blood gets too hot-tempered."

"Likely we can speed the work now," Sam said, but Waits told him no more work that day since he was bound to go up to Massengale to get Venger set right. "And I'd thank you for the loan of your gun, Sam, till I get home to lay hands on my own. Gin he pins me to a tree bole it'll be maybe handy to let a piece of daylight through him first."

"Foolishment!" said Sam. "You just heard Doc Peters say Bracy'd not got good sense."

"All the same, raving ain't safe," Waits disagreed. "I'll be carrying me a pistol from now on."

And Sam was now rid of both his plagues at once, and lamented him that the work on the mill was at a stand.

CHAPTER XXIV

AGAIN Dena went by the linking path over to Lowes' cabin. Mostly it had come to be a habit with her to go over and talk with Barsha, but since Waits had come home Dena had to go warily lest she happen on a time Waits would be at his house, for that would be unfitten. The heart of two weeks had gone by and he had not come nigh her, which she found harder than his being off in far places.

The cold chill was creeping into the latter end of hot days, and fall would be here soon as the next moon turned. It was yet warm enough to sit by the house door, and there Dena found Barsha sewing a rag mat together by the scant evening's light. Barsha bade her enter, and she sat on the step by Barsha's feet, it being too late in the day to be worth a chair. She looked up at Cragg Hill overpeering the cabin, and shifted her place to one side, as if she would move out of the way ere it crushed her.

Seeing that Barsha by this day knew all that was in her heart, they stayed for a while without words, and the quietness pressed around them.

Barsha said: "Must be I'm getting deaf as a beetle. I'm disable to hear ary word you say."

And thus being asked to set forth what she had in head, Dena made answer: "Hit'll be a far day ever I leave a man light a fire in my heart again."

"You might maybe keep the fire to warm life with."

Dena studied upon this a while, and drew her shawl close around her shoulders, when the shadow of Cragg Hill darkened over her. "Fire must 'a' gone perfectly out," she said, "is what makes me feel so cold. What's good for cold lonesomeness?"

" 'Pends on the cause of it 'n' how it come to pass. Every bird got to hatch its own eggs, and my life's teaching likely might not fit your ways."

"I'd best be moving homewards," Dena put in; "sun's heavily westering."

"They's men," Barsha told her, "can go all the way through their life without loving; but never was a woman could."

"I'd best get home afore dark."

"Women," Barsha said, "is made to give out; and efn they don't find a man 'n' children they take it out on other folks' property; or they'll maybe use it on dumb beasts. Times I think that's the thankfullest way." Barsha's long, wrinkled face puckered up, and she studied Dena as if she was making up her mind to tear part of her thought loose and give it to the young one. Directly she said: "Hit's small-hearted to be turned cold by a man's not loving you."

Dena's eyes grayed in the evening light.

"What's a man," Barsha asked, "what's a man more or less?"

"You don't know about that," Dena made answer. "You've likely forgot. Times a man's all there is. You've been wed a mort o' years and got your man by your side."

And now Barsha shut her teeth, snap, taking a last bite out of her words: "Rashe Lowe you talking about? Lack-a-day praise us! And what good's it do to have the body of a man by your side nights without end?" She got out of her chair, and her rag mat fell to the floor, but neither woman stooped to pick it up. "Love may fail of lasting out, but gin you make a man a harsh promise, hit's bound to be kept." Barsha drew herself up tall, and then bent to get her sewing work. She put it on the chair, saying: "I'd best start getting supper ready. The old man'll be along any time now. I properly should have set the peas back sooner. We got a heap o' cow-peas this gathering—how'd yours come out?"

"Yet you keep right on living with him," Dena said.

"Happen yours failed of yielding, I can give you a parcel o' cow-peas that'll make you out to do till Christmas. O' course I keep with him—who else'd I live with?"

"You're light-minded to be talking this way."

Barsha went back kitchen to excite the supper fire, and her voice came through the house. "So's you're light-minded, hurts can't go deep. Sorrow comes unsent for, but we likely may turn it with a small welcome."

In the low-roofed room with the mud-chinked walls and bending floor, Barsha belonged as if made to order, and Dena, watching her, saw how great a thing life may be made to do. Barsha, by all that was right and fitten, should have been walking upright in wide free spaces; yet here she had shaped herself—not out

of love that died long ever ago, but out of keeping her harsh promise. And Dena wondered could she do so much herself, and fit into her life the shape it was.

"What I say is," Barsha went on, while she sat by the forward fire to pare the potatoes, "sift men grain by grain, 'n' you'll find 'em all chaff. But no woman that's got her reason is going to sift. Either she takes a man altogether, or loses him with a thankful heart for what she's been spared."

"How come I don't feel thankful at losing Waits? Maybe I'm thankful 'n' don't know it—like the preacher said about being saved 'n' not knowing it till we're told."

Barsha scraped at a potato without doing it any good. "Being saved feels a lot like being lost, heap o' times," she said.

"Hit's been two weeks he's back 'n' not been nigh."

"A great time, two weeks," Barsha said, hiding a smile at the corner of her mouth. "Best part of a year, you might say."

"You're laughing at me, Mis' Lowe!"

Barsha got up and put the potatoes in a hot skillet, and the slow sizz of fat and the smell of frying wove through the house, while she moved across and across the kitchen-place finding things for the table. "Shut the house door," she said.

Dena had given over craving to go, and when she had pushed the door shut, she sat herself upon a chair by the smidgen of fire upon the hearth. "I been studying, maybe since Waits no more wants me—there's Burl Bracy."

Barsha stood tall by the stove, and a large shadow of her hovered on the far wall. Then she stood the potatoes back on the stove to tender themselves, and put the coffee forward.

The two women now sat before the fire and Barsha threw on another faggot so it would give light; and the place was full of suppertime and quietness and a safe homestead.

"They say Gillow's girl is come back to live in these parts," Barsha said.

"She was up to meeting a night was a week gone Wednesday."

"Is her baby red-headed, or ain't it?"

"It is."

"Likely you don't recall that Bonnie Gillow was raised in Robbins' Gap by Ranson's sister."

"You suspicion—him?"

"Worse 'n that—I know," Barsha said. "And not only Bonnie Gillow, either. I 'wared you ever ago to be shet o' that trash. Must be you've gone bereft o' your senses, Allardene Howard."

"He witches me till I can't help myself."

"Them kind do. Hit's them eyes o' his makes a person feel queer. They tells where a man with witching eyes will end up crazy. Hit'd be a surprise didn't he go raving senseless over that blockade, leave alone he was born a scatterwit. Take you a habit o' putting him outen mind."

Back of Dena's eyes felt hot, like maybe tears she'd be shamed to let fall. But Barsha saw her hands crying and felt dowie for the young thing that life yet

had strength to hurt. From out of Barsha's fellowly heart came words on a suddenty: "I'm a old 'n' cheese-head fool," she said, "talking words only fitten for a used-up life, and you being only at the beginning."

"Efn I got to be old to edzact out what you say, I feel old right now as the everlasting hills. Do you reckon I'll be wise when I get real old?"

Rashe Lowe's step sounded on the path from yonder field, and Barsha hurried her words. "There's just three things makes a woman wise," she told Dena. "First is a new heart-break—fire-new 'n' burning. Second is—and it's a heap worse—finding out heart-break don't last, since it heals up, 'n' soon, too—and don't leave so much as a scar."

She listened, with her head on one side to the kitchen door. "He's shutting the chickens up happen there should that skunk come around again."

Dena said: "What's the other, Mis' Lowe? You said 'three.' "

"Third thing?" Barsha asked. "Why, third thing is finding out love ain't near the heaven it started out by being."

"All is, efn he don't have use for me whatever, I'd sooner he'd never come back."

"Maybe he's ripening some notion in his head," Barsha comforted. "Waits don't lightly give up what his heart's set on."

DENA got up to go, and had only finished her farewells when she stood in the doorway and saw Waits coming towards the house, as natural as if he'd never

gone away. First she thought she'd run—but where to? And they would have to meet some time, so as well get it over. While her eyes watched his dark figure coming down the path her head was getting ready to meet him. To his "Pleasant evening, Dena" she would say, "Truly it is, Mist' Lowe!"—and when he gave back: "Won't you linger a while?"—she would answer: "No, I'd best be getting on."

But now he was come to the house and was hollering for Barsha like he might be ten years old only; and when he drew up to the door and Dena was standing there, he was struck in a maze, since surely she was not his mother, yet what doing there? He had been the best part of two weeks planning out a meeting with her, since he'd been blocked that first Sunday. But now he was all unready.

"Where at is she?" he asked; and scowled like if Barsha was bedfast it would be Dena's fault.

"Back kitchen," Dena snapped at him, hurt and sore that his thoughts were all Barsha's, and there was no light in his eyes for her.

He pushed in past her, though flattening himself against the door post and careful not to touch her.

"I got a right to come visiting," she said; and without looking around she called: "A good evening to you, Mis' Lowe. Come on over to see me!" And she walked out the gate and over the nigh field, her head set high and her heart tight betwixt anger and tears.

Barsha was putting supper food on the table, but when Waits shadowed the kitchen door, she took things away and set them back on the stove.

"Don't I get to eat?" Waits asked, sulky-sullen for he didn't know what was.

"Never did have a habit of feeding trash persons in my house," Barsha told him, "and I ain't aiming to begin with you."

Waits stared at her, and when all was laid aside, Barsha said: "Good food to be had down to the hotel, they tell me."

Not since he was knee high to a duck had Waits been so treated. In his little days Barsha had a habit of denying him next meal when he had crossed her notion of what was right. But that was child times. He stretched big and strong in the doorway, a man grown.

"I'm craving supper food," he ordered.

"This not being your house—yet," Barsha answered, "you get what's offered you and not ary smidgen over."

The mother and son faced this together. Tall, unyielding, and a liken look of stubbornness in their eyes. Waits bethought him how long his mother could stand in one place unmoving, and that he could do as much. Maybe some of the set-back food would scorch and she would move to save it. Barsha thought about Rashe coming in directly, and what would he think of such untold goings-on.

Outside it was grown dark. The two stood still.

Rashe's voice came from the barn, lilting a strong song with no tune in it. Waits looked over his shoulder. Barsha broke silence. "The short path is dark," she said, "but red hair is as good a lantern as need be."

Waits was gone like a candle blown out; and Barsha

stirred herself to set supper on the table against Rashe's coming in.

Waits had no far run before he saw Dena ahead of him entering the short path. He jumped the last fence and came up with her, out of wind and panting like a sheep-dog. He laid his hand on her arm, and she shook it off as if it might have been a wasp. Her face was white as paper and her eyes looked straight ahead.

"Dena . . ." he began, and there he stuck, since too many words are as bad as none. "Hit's only I wasn't ready, Dena—don't you see—not *ready*. All the time I been outland I been studying about the time I'd get back, and the way I'd first greet you; and I've thought—Dena, stop—I got to tell you—don't you see it's just I wasn't *ready* a while back? And Dena . . ."

She gave him a dim smile, listening to his voice more than his words, for she had forgotten how warm his voice could be, and was all wrapped up in it, and had no manner of notion what he had been saying.

"And, Dena . . ."

"Well, what about 'Dena?'"

But Waits didn't know, now she came to put it that way; and they walked on a piece, till she said: "You'd best go on back."

He said: "I aim to walk home with you."

Directly they had to walk single through a close piece of the path where bushes and vines grew near, so that he went first and held them back for her so they didn't lash—just as though she hadn't come that

path all alone a mort of times. She could hold back scrub for herself, come to that. When they came clear of this, they walked side by side again, and each got more out of content with the other, and were surprised that meeting should be so much harder a matter than parting.

All summer Dena had lived her days in empty space that was sometimes too narrow and other times so big and hollow she might have cried out for loneness. Yet now he had come back, preening himself that here he was; and he suspected her of being in all haste to take him up once more. Where'd her pride come to should she act glad right now?

Waits was all this time puzzling what ailed Dena? He was back; he was well content to be once more in his home-place. Then the whole world, and especially Dena, ought rightly to rejoice. Never had he thought about her not being glad!

"I aimed to come up to greet you Sunday after I got back."

"You never got there."

"Owing to somebody else being first."

She went on unanswering.

"'Tain't like I'd forgot you all time I was gone."

"How was I to know other?"

"One thing, for a sample, I mailed you a picture card."

"I never got ary card nor postal letter."

"All is, I mailed it!" he said, puzzled.

"You say so."

"Lowes never told a lie yet," he answered her, walking stiff and sore hurt by her side.

And at last they parted strange and in great hurt; and Waits turned back from the fence at the edge of Howards' field.

CHAPTER XXV

UPON a day thereafter Fayre Jones took himself dandling over to Howard's Place to see Bess, and hoping to slip a side word in for Waits with Dena. He had it in head to ask Bess flat out would she wed with him, and this last was such a puzzlement that he sat him down to think about it on every fallen tree he came to, and as a consequence the sun was well towards down when he got to the house.

"Bess is down to the spring," Dena told him from the kitchen, where a good smell of supper was stirring in the air. "Our well's dried out and we're bound to fetch 'n' carry. She's been gone this half hour, and I'd take it a favor of you to fetch her 'n' the piggin back up here." And while he started off like a rabbit, Dena came to stand in the back door with a big spoon in her hand, and called to him: "Hark now! You're not to stay! Bring her back up, and you're bid to supper."

Fayre went down to the hollow where the spring was, and the lean woods on the hillside were soaked with the shadows of eveglôm, but on the crest each tree was gold with the last left light. And by the spring was an old oak, all gusty and twisty, rattling its lone bunch of ragged leaves. And under the tree he saw Bess, and the full pail of water standing on a rock, and Bess was sitting with folded hands and leaning back

against the tree with her eyes closed, smiling as if she knew pleasant things.

"Hi!" Fayre called down softly as he went on, "didn't know were you awake."

"Don't scarcely know it myself yet," she told him, not surprised, for the reason she'd heard him all the way from the house. "I come after water and 'pears like I can't break away again. Disabled to leave the day's prettiness, I reckon." She sat up and smoothed her gold hair with her hands, and picked herself up from where she sat and crossed the branch by the foot-path log and came to stand before Fayre.

"Say 'n' tell me, Fayre Jones, did ever you see a woods goblin?" She turned her head to one side, like she might anyway be hearing one.

"See one now," said Fayre, taking her little light-set body into his eyes.

"That's not sense," Bess said, while she looked more like it than before. "I mean ever see where one had bewitched a thing? This spring is a joyful spot for tree-spirits 'n' such; and there's been hants around here"—her blue eyes opened wide—"only Dena won't own to its being hants."

She turned in the path and set toward the house, Fayre coming after her, the pail of water swinging in a long travel at the end of his loose-hung arm.

"Once get up to the house," he thought, "and there'll be no doing what I come for. I got to ask her—I was all set for that, and then she started my mind studying about goblins 'n' hants. Now she's about to get back 'n' all mixed up with her folks before a man

can say a word. Get back now and there'll be supper to eat, 'n' after that, for manners, I'll have to talk with old man Howard into eternity." Yet he was scared to say to Bess right now, "Stop where you stand!" for fear he'd not be able to go on and say anything else.

Maybe Bess had it in head to plague him, since it was not in reason to suppose she didn't know what it was brought him around this night—for it shone clear in his eyes. She went on climbing the path, for it would not be seemly manners to linger too slow with him. The top of the highest hill westward had already bitten a piece out of the sun, and soon it would be all eaten up. She went on, and inside her head said "Yes" to him before ever he had called out a word. She was fearful she might start crying in a minute.

And then on a rock by the side of the spring path Fayre set down the piggin and reached out his long arms for Bess, and turned her around by her shoulders, and picked her up, even-high with himself, and kissed her like a person does children.

"Let's talk about us getting married," he said.

"Marrying's a serious-solemn thing," Bess said. "Fayre Jones, set me down."

"That it surely is," he agreed, "surely and certainly. That's what Waits Lowe says no longer ago than the day he left home. 'Hit's unknowen all that goes with it' was his words."

"What's he know of it?" Bess mocked Fayre's solemn voice. "*He's* never yet been wed."

"Neither have you, I hope," Fayre answered her. "But it was you started saying that."

"All I meant to say was, there's no such great haste to be wed. We ought properly to hold back like Dena 'n' Waits till we know efn our minds is set right."

"We got no need to linger for they two, Bess. They's dream-struck 'n' curious many ways—let alone Burl Bracy stands betwixt 'em. Waits's look is that free 'n' high a person scarce dare handle him like a neighbor, 'n' Dena's going on uncommitted to life. I expects there's more to 'em than to common folks like you 'n' me—or maybe less. Anyways, we've no call to linger."

"Why not you do like Waits 'n' lose yourself a spell? Journey a far piece to see what-all the earth looks like."

"I never aim to shift a foot or inch. There ain't ary thing upon earth worth the slavery of a long journey to see."

Bess turned her back on him, while she said: "Anyways, I'm craving to hold back a spell longer."

"For why, Bess?" he asked, turning her around and holding her by the shoulders.

"I ain't got my mind steadied on you yet. Hit might maybe take a change and settle on some other young fellow."

Fayre was put about and struck useless. He stood woeful, yet still holding onto her.

"Somebody, take for a sample," Bess said, "that ain't got ears half-a-mile long."

Fayre felt of his ears and smiled his widest. "Saving my ears, don't you reckon you'd be happy with a man like me, Bess?"

"Oh, surely, undoubtedly—yes!" she made soft answer; and being free of his hold, she whirled and ran up the path, calling back to him: "Efn he wasn't too awful much like you!"

When they got to the house, Dena was in a rare taking for more water. "Come on to your supper," she said, "and it would be a surprise didn't you get burned-black potatoes to eat, and beans that are busting open like popcorn for dryness. Set down. You don't get coffee till the water boils. Little more 'n' I'd have made it with milk."

After they had eaten, they dragged Homer back to the forward room by the fire and the girls set the food aside, while Fayre looked out of the door and talked over his shoulder with Homer, scraps of news about goings-on down in Glen Hazard, which Homer snapped up as if he had had no other supper at all.

When Dena and Bess came forward, Fayre said: "Seems like that red-hot sun that went down a while back must have set fire to something over world's edge. Storm's coming."

And truly the back end of the day was darkened with more than nightfall. The evening was solemn and chill, and the bats chopped up the thick gloom into patterns, cutting and slicing across the yard. One got under the porch roof and beat fearfully against the rafters, and Bess called: "Come in 'n' shut that door! Do you want that beast to get in the room and bring evil to the house?"

"Sakes, no!" Fayre said, pulling back; but he was not quick enough, and the bat dropped through the

chink of the door like a thrown rock. The girls screamed and threw each an apron over her head, till Fayre caught the death-bringer in his hat, and flung hat and bat together into the yard, where rain already began to fleck down.

While they sat by the fire, uneasied and wry, they heard a holler, and Fayre said: "Yonder's Waitstill. Do you want I should bid him enter?" And Dena said, uncaring: "As well."

He came in and sat down near to Homer on the far side from Dena. And while he answered Homer's questions about all he'd seen outland, his eyes, black in the firelight, searched dark corners of the room.

Dena asked: "Lost something?"

"Thought maybe somebody else was here."

And the Devil made Dena say: "If so, safe hid."

And their eyes were at one time pleading and wrathful; till Waits turned full on Homer and took up his story about the big farm run by machinery; and Homer was patient, believing it but a traveler's tale. The patter of rain came down on the roof in sudden spray.

Bess and Fayre held hands; and Dena looked into the fire and tried master not to harken to what Waits was saying to Homer. And through the next hour the storm grew, and thunder quarreled in the far hills.

Homer said: "Last storm of the fall's about to happen; and hit'd be a surprise didn't it be raw cold thereafter. You boys best step over to Barts' for a night's harboring."

While they listened the door crashed back, and in

the opening Burl Bracy stood, his coat gleaming with new rain, his bright hair wet and wild; and all the pent devils were shining in his eyes while he peered into the room.

Waits jumped to his feet. The wind flew in and scattered ashes fit to burn the house up, and the room was blackness and red sparks and noise.

"Shut the door," Homer said. And when this was done, Bracy stood with his back to it and the room was still again and dangerous. Into the room came the smell of raw liquor, and they saw Bracy well gone in drink already.

No words between them as they stood there, feeling the power of hate. Hate, hard as a horse-chestnut, and unshapely, yet so slick that neither could catch hold of it any way at all. And the quietness was a fearful thing.

Dena felt a queer lightness, as if she knew for the first time that she was alive. "I am a person," she thought, "not just a girl that has to marry some man." And watching each of those two men who craved to own her, they seemed on a sudden to be funny. And she laughed, loud and sharp, like a person not in his senses. But when they did not move by a flicked muscle from looking at one another, fear came to her. This was some unnatural thing, and no easy jower to be broken by a girl's voice. But she was a person, separate unto herself. She said: "I'll give you two holy minutes to be gone out of here."

A spasm came over Waits's face, but neither moved.

Homer spoke out: "Boys both, outen yourself!

'Tain't fitten such goings-on should happen before women. Outen!"

Long habit the young men had to obey the old, if only for reverence; and, still keeping each other in eye, the two went out—Bracy backing and Waits walking down upon him. And with the moving of their bodies came words, slow as their careful feet.

"I gin ye dar' to search me out!"

"Leave me lay hands upon you—and evil 'n' sorrow is come to you, Waits Lowe!" Bracy warned, while he slid from his coat and flung it on the ground behind him.

Fayre Jones cried out to Waits from where he stood in the doorway holding back the girls: "Watch out he don't jump you! He'd be a good jumper!"

"Yes, Lord!" Waits drawled, "and a better runner, time I'm through."

Waits held his feet slow and Bracy crept backward while they moved to the bare ground beneath the sugar maple. They were in the rain, standing face to face—crouching. Bracy's right hand flashed back and drew his knife like a ray of light from his belt. As he swung it up, Waits gripped his wrist, and Waits's gun, at full cock, was pressed to the side of his head.

"Move that knife and you're dead," Waits warned. Bracy struck up the gun with his left hand and it went off harmless in the air. Waits held Bracy's wrist so that the knife hung useless over him. They swayed and slipped on the rain-dark earth, the knife yet held high. They twisted and strained and fell and rolled on the ground; and in the fall Waits loosed hold of his gun

and snapped at the arm he held, and the knife dropped and Bracy roared with pain. Close-locked they struggled, Waits bent on keeping Bracy from his lost knife; and a yell from Fayre Jones was too late to 'ware him, when Bracy reared back and flinging full his weight downward struck Waits's head against the main rock wheron stood the great black washing-kettle.

Bracy drew out from the loosed hold and jumped to his feet, staring at the black heap on the ground, and when Fayre Jones let out a yell that echoed back over Big Wolf Bald, and came down on him, Bracy ran.

Fayre gathered Waits's gun, and took long-footed after Bracy, firing shots and curses into the night. Dena and Bess ran into the yard, Bess crying out: "Hold the losel! Shoot him—kill him!" but Fayre already was out of hearing, and they went to lift Waits, who was by now stirring and blinking as from a long sleep. He thrust the girls back, and tried to speak, but his throat had no sound; and all the mad in Waits that would have been content with a hard fight choked in his ringing head and ate up all reason; and he picked himself up off the ground and took out amain to give chase.

Back in the house, Homer Howard pulled his quilt around him and thought about rippits of his younger days. "Hit's serious," he said to the girls when they came in and crouched over the fire; "I'll be bound it's serious. Dena, you ought never to have left Waits go off that way last springtime. Now he's liable to get hurt with all that's grown from it."

Bess had carried in Bracy's coat that was fallen on

the ground, and in her hand the scattering of pocket things. While she stuffed them back she cried out: "Lookit, Dena! Lookit what is! Here's a postal card backed to you from Waits. Now where at d'you reckon . . ."

And Dena stared at it and grabbed it from Bess and let out a low wailing cry and went out into the rain, blindly running, and crying out; and Homer went on: "Bess, you take a coat 'n' go after 'n' fetch her home; she's gone clean bereft."

WAITS ran through the rain, gasping for lost breath and unknowen if the thunder was in his head or the heavens above. And he came to Barts' Deadening, where ghost-trees stood like white stone pillars holding up the low-flung clouds. It was quicker to thread among them than to hunt a path around the edge, but the knife-sharp stubble caught at his shoes and cut his ankles. The slanted log cabin where the Bart brothers lived was a black lump against the slope. They were fast abed and no light showed. Waits went on, and over Barts' fence, and his feet got tangled in some dead honeysuckle vine that held him. For which reason he heard a sound of groaning near at hand, and came on Fayre Jones who had chased in such a useless manner that he had sprained an ankle over a rock, and lay cursing himself and Bracy in equal measure. Waits left him there and took the harsh way up Cragg Hill this side his home-place, for the sound of broken thicket came from that way through the rain; and a lightning flash showed a black moving blot climbing

and struggling. Waits followed close after while the storm hardened. But the cloud of pain in his head mixed his feet, so he lagged and Bracy gained the hill's crest and was gone from him.

In the open road they ran master, and poured down into Glen Hazard where, by a last streak of green light, he saw Bracy double out northward making toward the Dark Corners. As he came into Glen Hazard, the night train went by—a streak of noise more like a rush of wind through a leaf fire. The signal lights over the station danced in the storm; and the oil lamp Ranson Gillow kept for a watch-light in his store sent forth just long enough light to reach the black rain pools where the cinder streets were trodden in hollow mud-patches.

Waits ran on through the town, beyond the big mill, round to where the old trail heads up over the ridge and beyond—all unmindful in his battered head that in the Dark Corners a man can sooner lose himself than find another.

TERRIFIED herds of clouds rushed over the sky, and trampled across the moon, so that light was blotted out and Dena ran blindly, driven this way and that, catching at bushes, slipping and stumbling; and a sob moaned over and over: "Hit just can't be let happen!"

Across the path frightened water streamed and ran master to get away from the flash and roar of the storm, while the thunder tore rain out of the clouds and flung it down in fretful bursts. With each new lightning flash the whole world came alight, so she

could see the farthest hill's top and the smallest things near to her—the separate branches on the trees and the moss on the rocks by the pathway. She had in head to 'ware Rashe Lowe to hunt out Sheriff Joe Marks to check the boys ere a woeful hurt was done, but it seemed she had been running since time everlasting with ice-cold handfuls of water being thrown at her, and still she did not come to Lowes' fence line. Then a new flash showed her the broken-down fence-rail out of the back of Gillow's place, and she knew she had come on too far. In the dark her feet had taken the path that traces the base of Cragg Hill, around Lowes' and on to Glen Hazard.

She whirled about, to beat her way back; but she was spent with fear and weariness, and when her foot slipped she lay where she had fallen, feeling only: "Awfulness is going to happen 'n' I got to stop it 'n' can't."

CHAPTER XXVI

Burl Bracy made light circumstance of leaving Howard's Place, speeded by Fayre Jones's wild bullets, but he was in no manner sure of his way in the stress of the storm, and besides was yet gramyed by the vapors of his drink. So he mislaid himself up the steep side of Cragg Hill where no path lay, and the only going was by handholds. His wrenched arm was a torture to him, but he could make out to use it, being hastened by the shots that fell overly near him. The firing stopped, but the crash of one climbing after helped him forward till he came to the open road.

The rain slackened while he over-ran himself down into the smurr of the chill hollow where lay Glen Hazard. The town slept, and there was none to mark his going; and the road beyond was still, even of dogs, who commonly 'ware of a strange happening in the night.

Bracy was bedeviled by a sound that might have been following feet—or the echo of his own—and this thing was direful, so that in a whirl of fear he fled in stress toward his home-place, taking blind and unwitting the short way northward that leads to Robbins' Gap. The vapors of the blockade wreathed from his losing mind, and through their mist he saw fearsome things that threatened. A woman's figure skulked from

the laurel scrub and barred his way. He checked, stumbled, and fell through her wraithly form upon the wet earth; got to his feet and rushed headlong forward, more terror-struck that none was there.

Now all the furies of the harsh, cold woods were held inside his head, and where a burning hate had flared and died was only mad void, chill as a cave and lonesome as the shore of a lost lake at dawn. He doubled and fended through slant paths, tore through the spiteful scrub and cursed the vines that tripped him; rolled down sudden slopes, waded waters and hid choking for breath behind rocks to harken, till the unmerciful night threw bitter mocking 'round him and drove him on, shorn of his senses.

The graceless hours slid by, and at the turning of the night the storm was away. The sky, cloud-cast and heavy, was lightened by a hid moon and all blown about by an uneasy wind feeling its way to winter. When through the night there came the slinking whine of a catamount gone supperless, Bracy was taken with a useless fear fit to unjoint his bones. He blundered on, long since neglectful of the way he went, his wits all adrift, befooled by every shadow. Gillow's girl stood by a sudden rock, holding his child in her arms, and he ran a wide circle to be free. A lightning-struck tree reared its scarred trunk before him, and in its spare branches he read his writing on the white sky.

His face ghostly white, his hair dripping lank before his flinching eyes, the shatterwit went on, while coldness wrapped around his sweating form. And when he

fell forspent upon a sodden bank an ague caught him so he shook master.

He scoured up Wild Cat Hollow and back into the Dark Corners, while the new wet cold bit deep, and the unloving hills closed in hard back of him. And in the pale raw light of afterstorm he came upon a deadening, where girdled trees stood white in a forsaken field that lay aslant the ridge. The snake fence was broken and rotting, and he snapped down a bar in getting over. Yon side the ruined field there stood a little house of unchinked logs. The door hung open and the wooden window shutter beat back and forward in the wind.

Burl Bracy took himself inside. A black wind drove through every chink and sobbed and cried like wastrel children in the chimney-place. He and the cold stayed in the house together. The lorn cabin shook with his tread as he shummicked this way and that. He sat him down upon the floor, and, soon as he was still, all the noises of the night broke loose and brought an added torment to his fear. He knew them all—the wind tearing at the topmost branches of the trees, the sound of a close-by waterfall, the crash of rocks falling harshly down the slides new-weakened by the rain. He knew them all—the sound of the beasts astir, the mountain lion howling yon side the ridge, and broken echoes of the night birds' cries backing from the hollow. He knew them all, yet lay bound and helpless, made sport of by his ruined mind.

Till, from the rafters close above his head, there came a long-drawn quivering scream that withered

into a chuckle of crazed laughter, and sent him clean bereft. And he picked himself up and stumbled from the shelter where the owl was, pushing onwards against his dread that held a cold hand against his chest. Now through the white misting of the shrouded moon unnumbered ghosts pressed near. Held by their clutching fingers that were vines, he writhed and flung himself free, while still from the downgone house the hell-born laughter drove him on. A stubborn thorn caught him, and he screamed and tore at it with bleeding hands, and still climbed up the ragged flank of Wild Cat Ridge.

He gained the knife-sharp crest, and in two strides came full upon the face of a catamount, its lone head thrust from the murk of laurel scrub, and—well knowen by his drifted wits it was yet another demon to curse him—he made to have done, and threw himself full forward thereon.

And it being the edge they fell off the mountain together.

CLEAN-CUT against the dawn of a hard sky the blue hills stood up sharp and still in the November cold, ere Waits Lowe came to the crest of Wild Cat and gave over his search.

He had come after far wandering to the path over against the Dark Corners, so it was near dawn when he found the trail Bracy had run before him. And he got to the far side of the deadening where a fence-rail showed newly broken, and the day being now fully come, he saw which way Bracy had gone in the night,

and followed after, though with some trouble and a few ill words.

Then he saw fringed trees against the sky that marked the crest of Wild Cat Ridge, no wider than three jumps across. The slope he climbed was steep, but on the yonder side the mountain dropped straight down, with only enough edge scrub to hide the ugly fall.

The valley was a green basin lined with trees; and the sun got up and made his breakfast off the fluffs of white mists heaped in the basin. And Waits sat on the edge and harkened to the forest birds' new-wakened song, and smelled the sweetness of the wet and healing woods. He watched a buzzard turning round and round, and puzzled that anything might be dead this fine-pretty day.

Directly, he got to his feet, glad of the chill new morning that washed all madness from him; and wondered him how long away Bracy might be by this time; and smiled to think he had run the scatterling so far a piece out of Glen Hazard.

"Clean gone away!" he made a guess. "Hot-footed as he had wildfire in his shoes." He stood near the slickenside where Bracy had gone over, but his eyes were on the thread path that traced the hill's crest to an easy fall—the way he suspected Bracy of having run.

One thought of following yet further came to him, but he threw it aside. "Hit'll be a sharp time ere he pesters in Glen Hazard again. And where's the sense of running myself catawampus overtaking a man I

don't aim to do nothing to? Reckon he's scarce as need be."

He tied his red kerchief around his head—for it now took time to hurt—and turned him homeward with breakfast in his mind.

CHAPTER XXVII

Sheriff Joe Marks came out of his office room back of Gillow's store that morning; and he got upon his horse and set sharply onward for a ride to Clear Fork to seek a man whose word had great weight with him. For Marks was mightily gramyed in his head by all the bearm concerning the breaking of the long-pent jower, and could not content himself what was to do. With a fighting matter yet unraveled in his district it seemed to the Sheriff that there properly ought to be some arresting done.

He was yet turning this matter over in his head when he met the man he had set out to find.

"A fair day, Preacher Howard!" he hailed.

"May it be so," Virgil answered; and the two rode side by side toward Glen Hazard. They looked between their horses' ears, and no word was spoken till they had gone a mile or more. Then they drew up, the Sheriff and the Preacher, and each drank, as a token of trust, from the other's flask.

"I'm surprised at us," Marks said, corking the Preacher's liquor with a firm twist and handing the bottle back. "I'm took aback at us, sir!"

Virgil Howard wiped his mouth. "Is the corn mine?" he asked mildly, "or ain't it? I can't recollect selling one stalk to the officers."

"Speaking about law," Marks said, "I'm searching Waits Lowe."

"That you are not," Virgil told him, "at least not efn you crave to get elected again. All the citizens is friendly to Waits; besides—what for?"

"That's not my business to say," the Sheriff told him. "My duty tells me 'bring him in'—and that other trash, too, gin I lay hands on him—and we'll see what comes out in court."

"No we won't," the Preacher answered, this being his time for being stubborn. "We'll see what comes out right here, betwixt you 'n' me."

They walked their horses slowly.

"Hark to me, Joe Marks," Virgil said. "Hit was on the day foregoing the jower I was over to Sam Ewart's to see about getting me some bill' stuff sawed, and learned how Waits 'n' this foreigner were shaping for each other, and that Bracy was haunting back in the locality. So I beds that night up at Rashe's thinking maybe to be handy should a happening take place. Waits went on up to Dena's gin supper was through, and Rashe 'n' Barsha 'n' me sat on, hoping better than we feared. Rashe was restless to trail along, but me not being so wise before as after, held him back, saying it would shame Waits to be cosseted like a cradle-child. But after the storm come up, Barsha took such a spasm of fidgets that we brogued on up toward Howard's place to ease her mind, and that way we come on Dena, forespent and fallen in the wet pathway."

"What doing there?"

"None of our affairs. Well, no more had I gathered

her in my arms than here come Bess running and screaming she'd found Fayre Jones lying broke beyond Barts' fence. Hit took time to struggle 'em all in house and hear how matters had took place. Waits 'n' Bracy being yet loose on the hills, nought was to do; but I set out riding, in case maybe; but more to content Dena."

He stopped and turned around on Marks, who yet waited to hear a word that should favor Waitstill Lowe.

Virgil went on: "Hit was morning ere I come on him, walking towards his home-place; and he told me he'd lost sight o' Bracy, and was mortally glad he done so before he managed him a hurt."

The Preacher's eyes were light and glad when he said this; but Marks quenched them the next minute, saying: "That don't count in where he'd been, nor what done, meanwhile. What you say he said don't prove a matter no more'n what he claimed. Uneasied I am to own it."

Preacher Virgil Howard was mad. He snatched off his hat and rumpled his white wings of hair, and turned snapping blue eyes on the Sheriff. "Joe Marks," he said, "more time 'n plenty I've caught 'n' larrupped you for stealing my apples when you was a tad; and now you come a man grown 'n' put questions agin my justice. Waits Lowe's no liar—maybe you think I am!"

"All is, you can't speak to what you never witnessed."

"All is," Virgil told him sharply, "you can't arrest Waits Lowe owing to that foreigner's having lost himself."

"How'd I know Waits didn't in a manner kill him?"

"Go ask Waits. He's up at his house cosseting the crack in his head."

"And you reckon he'd tell me?"

Virgil said: "I never said he would."

"He'd not tell me a lone thing."

"No more would he."

"Then where's the sense asking him?" Marks puckered up his forehead. "Seems we've run offen the line. I got to study a spell."

"Well, see you don't so far forget yourself as to arrest Waits on no charge whatsoever," the Preacher snapped at him.

"No haste to unfriendly Waits Lowe, grant me that," Marks complained, still in a struggle.

Virgil held out his hand and the Sheriff took it. "Thankful to know you stick by your fairness, Joe. Maybe my long-gone whippings took better'n I meant."

DOWN at mail-gathering there was as much talk as need be; and No. 6 had no more than got rid of itself northward before news of the breaking of the jower was spread through Glen Hazard. In Gillow's store there were more different kinds of news than would fit together. Some claimed that Waits and Bracy had met death together, some that Waits had done away with Bracy and taken himself to the Dark Corners out of law's reach, and there was talk already that Waits was to be up at court next Wednesday following to answer for murder. Uncle Shannon Budd had Bracy dead and holed under, while Sam Ewart claimed he

was yet lying out for Waits. The only thing that contented all was that the jower had headed up. When a matter is bound to happen, as well get on with it.

Now they cast back to what began it all, and Uncle Shannon Budd said: "Bracy'd no call to tear up the boy's fiddle."

"They tell where Waits flung your boiler on Bracy's foot—ain't it so, Sam?" Gillow asked.

Sam Ewart said: "Anybody could spare a toe and yet walk; but a man's fiddle is part of his insides. Judgmatically, I'd say the rope broke by a mistake, and Burl Bracy tore up Venger done-a-purpose."

"Looks like you was the root o' things, with that rotten gear," Gillow told him; and Sam blew out his white moustache and owned: "Matt keeps on at me, saying where a new rope would have spared all—but sakes bless us, Bracy's toe don't hurt me near as bad as the cost of a new tackle would."

"Where at's Fayre Jones?" Gillow asked. "Here's the Company's mail waiting."

"Sprained his ankle helping aid the jower," Luther Bart said. "He's up to Howard's, and efn being penned with Homer enduring his spell don't cure him of Bess, then all I say is, he's fast in love. Such a quarreling way that old man has got . . ." But Glen Hazard had heard this news till it was a weariness, and Uncle Shannon Budd called out, pressing Luther to tell what else he knew.

"There's Dena bedfast with a surprising cold; and Bess thick in the gullet with getting skin-soaked running after Dena; and Homer meaner'n a bushel o'

rattlesnakes. Place ain't fitten for a neighbor to ask 'How d'ye' at. Furthermore . . ."

"I got me a postal letter!" a voice shouted. "A postal letter where it says my name on it—that's how it come right to me, I'd not be surprised!"

"Gloriful gracious, Cajah Dobbs," Luther bit at him, sour at having his talk broken into. " 'Tain't so uncommon a matter!"

"I got me a postal letter," Micajah answered sulky, "and furthermore, you'll not deny it."

"Hi! Cajah," Sam Ewart said, "hit's been beyond a year we seen you. How you faring yonder of Wild Cat?"

"I got me a postal letter," Micajah said.

Micajah Dobbs was a shambling moldwarp of a man in overalls too big for him, and a crumpled brown hat with a bitten edge. His useless face was rough with red beard stubble, and his eyes might have been borrowed outen a sick cat; only his black broken teeth must have been his own since no beast would have kept them. He commonly used over at Four Mile Switch, and it was a circumstance for him to be seen in Glen Hazard. Now he held up his letter for all to see and threatened Luther Bart with it.

But Luther knew where to break Cajah. "A heap o' good *you'll* get outen a postal letter," he said slowly, "you that can't neither read nor write."

"No, sir, I own it," Micajah said; "I never took time for the pomps 'n' vanities."

"Leave plaguing him, Luther," Gillow said, to stay

a ruction. "Cajah, that cow-feed'll be all you owe me till you've paid some."

Luther Bart took up his news. "All is, Homer's right down envious of anybody being sick but him. With them two girls to much him he's been our prize cripple this many year—without meaning it, you might say—but with all down sick he's found out such a heap o' things he can do that it wouldn't surprise me did he get well. He'll do cleverly when the girls is wed."

"I doubt me Dena will be doing so, since Waits overdid his quarrel."

"Guessing on a woman is a losing gambling-game," Gillow said. "Best shut your teeth on what you know about Waits, or—whatever." He jerked his head to where Micajah Dobbs was leaning over the counter studying the back of his postal letter and hiding his shame that Luther had dragged out before all.

Luther Bart was taken in a heap to see what he had done to a man that was not worth stepping on. He trod across the store and laid his hand on Micajah's shoulder: "Not aiming to rile your feelings, you see, Cajah."

"I got me a postal letter," Micajah snapped at him. "Gwan away from around me."

"Want I should spell it out to you?"

Micajah was smit with the dorts and answered him: "No! Hit's more 'n likely there ain't nothing in it I don't know already; and it pleasures me just as much to have it to carry 'n' show around." He put his

precious thing away and then he picked up a sack of feed about the same size as himself and staggered to the door. There he turned around. "I got me a postal letter," he said. And the sack of feed hefting more than he had counted on, he put it down across the door-sill and went to sleep on it.

Luther Bart's face was brick red for shame and he took himself to the far back of the store, seeming to find himself a sorting of nails out of a barrel. " 'Tain't nought but a advertising letter from a mail-order," he muttered, "I seen that from the backing."

Dite Morgan said he would take the Company's mail over in place of Fayre Jones, and ere he went he offered a piece of news: "Rashe Lowe aims to build him a lean on his house against Waits brings Allardene Howard home—gin he yet does so after these taking-places."

And now came in Fayre Jones, inching along on a crutch cut out of a sapling branch, and grumbling that Micajah Dobbs made an unhandy doormat.

"Thought you was laid abed sick!" Gillow hailed him.

"Am," Fayre told him. "Got me a ride in a wagon." "And," he went on, "I ain't married to my father-in-law yet, and so I told him; and I left that place soon."

"Tell about the jower," Uncle Shannon Budd cried out. And Fayre pulled himself up on the counter and told all, favoring Waits; and he made clear how Bracy, thinking perhaps murder was done when he flung Waits's head on the rock, had gone kurling off and in

a manner lost himself, but if dead or not a person could only hope so.

"How about Waits Lowe chasing him meaning to kill?" one or two asked together.

Fayre's blue eyes opened their widest, and he said: "Great forever! Who's been growing such a notion! There ain't no manner of harm in Waits Lowe—not to say dangerous hurt."

"That's so," all agreed.

"Been rightly raised, and, saving his outland run, as sound-headed as a peckerwood."

"A man's got to break loose one time; and he come full circle without taking any harm from new learning."

"Still 'n' all, a man may 'a' been killed," Gillow said, "and in fairness I say Waits was chasing him. I heard a gun go off just over my place last night."

"Likely you did," Fayre said. "That was me chasing the stinking purp. But I failed of hitting him, Lord forgive a poor shot!"

"Ary person that puts us shet of Burl Bracy's done a everlasting favor," Luther said.

"That's right," Fayre granted. "What's he ever been saving a aggravation 'n' a scandal? He come a foreigner and stirred a mess o' strife; he went a foreigner 'n' none cares whence. Have you got ary other bottle o' that dandruff cure, Ranson? I been taking three spoonfuls a day after meals, 'n' it suits me fine."

Before Ranson Gillow could answer him, there came a scuffling at the door, with Preacher Howard and Sheriff Marks trying to get in at one time over Mica-

jah Dobbs, and Micajah himself wide awake once more and talking master.

"A man's got no more chance to tend his affairs in this nest of meddling linksters than a worm's got in a robin's nest. You falling over me, Sheriff Marks, was the chance that saved my piece o' news being wasted."

He sat himself up on the sack of feed, while all edged up to hear what was.

Sheriff Marks said: "What's all this talk o' news?—come out with it."

"Why, about the dead man beyond Wild Cat, o' course," Micajah quarreled. "Give a man time to draw breath. Hit's what I wearied myself all this way to tell; and then getting me a postal letter drove it outen my head; and Luther Bart set me that catawampus I unrecalled it."

"Come out with what you got to say," Sheriff Joe Marks hastened him.

Micajah waited to cut him a chew, and then went on: "With one thing 'n' another it come time for me to start back to get home gin I aimed to come it by sun's going down, so I picks up my load 'n' gets plumb so far as the door, when I took me a notion to sleep a while. Minute after, I get falled on top of."

"And what-all do you recall?"

"Well," Micajah said, "here I am, and here I set, as ary person not blind can see. Setting here I am, and furthermore," he finished up proud, while all stood ready to hear great news, "I got me a postal letter!"

"Dad Burn fly off with your letter!" Uncle Shannon

Budd shouted, while he picked himself out of a barrel of dried beans where he'd fallen in stretching to hear. "Come at what you got to say of Waits 'n' Bracy."

"I ain't got nothing to say of Waits Lowe or whoever," Micajah told him.

Sheriff Joe Marks grabbed him by one shoulder and stood him up. "Now, speak, Cajah Dobbs, and tell how come it."

They all gathered close around and waited, but all Micajah said was: "I come over here a free man, and gin ye dar' to touch me, Joe Marks! Offen your hand from me!"

Marks dropped him; and Micajah then told a circumstance.

"Happen you know where my house is set on the slant yon side Wild Cat, shadowed by the overpeer? Well, in the midst of the night come a noise like a rock fallen, which I'd been looking for this many a year; only it was softer'n a rock, and there come a foul scream, 'n' I pulled my quilt into my ears. Hit's a evil thing living lonely in the woods—gets a man scared. But whatever fell kept struggling, and whipping around in the dead leaves; and I was bound to go see. The storm being gone, the night was moon-white; and rolling around in my chicken yard was a man 'n' a beast—either catamount or lion or whatever. Hit'd gone cold since the storm, so I went on back to bed."

A snarl came from those who heard, and one or two gave out such words:

"Where at was your gun?"

"You got the kindness of a louse."

"Gin my time comes I'll go to Cajah Dobbs for aid —I will efn my wits is decayed a'ready."

Micajah kept on: "Back to bed I went. Come morning, I looked out again, and the beast was gone; and I holed under what was left of the man. Wasn't scarcely worth the trouble it was, but it uneasied me to have remnants on my properties."

The Glen Hazard townsmen growled again; and some said "What like was he?" And another: "Hit wonders me you took pains to carry the news."

"Too late to tell what like," Micajah said, harsh as an icicle, while he felt in his pocket. "There was some red hair on the barb' fence; and this here money belt." He drew out the belt, and all witnessed it Bracy's. "And being I'm a honest man, I says to myself, best give this to Sheriff Marks. Ain't nothing in it, you might say, but I'm honest enough to walk over with it."

"I've a mind to beat you with it," Marks said, which is the thanks Micajah got for all his trouble. And he made ready to go his ways, while the citizens drew back like he might have been poison.

Marks yet hindered him. "Who was the other man haunting around that night?"

Virgil Howard cried out: "He's trapping you, Cajah, watch your words!"

"Warn't none other," Micajah said, while Marks turned on Virgil and 'wared him to keep a shut mouth.

"What come to Waits Lowe?" he asked flat out.

"Warn't no other man. I tell you warn't. Likely I'd know did folks take a habit o' falling onto my properties thick as hailstones."

"The other man didn't linger 'round any, I guess."

And now Micajah got out of all temper: "Warn't none other I told you. Burn me up, Marks! How long since you went deaf in the ears? Warn't none other."

He gathered his burden, and went out of the town not giving a parting word to any.

"That'll be the back o' him till long along," Gillow said. "Always did take death or worse for that raven to come croaking around. . . . What d'you reckon he come in to tell for?"

Marks answered him: "To save it maybe being put on him should a search party find a thing out. His word's no manner o' use either way."

"Then you yet aim to go take Waits Lowe?" Howard asked, but in the midst of talk Marks did not answer.

Sam Ewart let go a long breath: "We can make use of Burl Bracy's space to keep something else in," he said.

And Uncle Shannon Budd finished up his latest offer of a drink and leaned up against Luther Bart and said: "There's me getting a new house, 'n' Sam Ewart getting a new mill, 'n' Homer Howard getting cured, 'n' Burl Bracy in a manner getting killed—we surely are getting us a heap o' new improvements in Glen Hazard."

"What of Waits Lowe?" Virgil asked again, and the citizens growled a threat at Sheriff Joe Marks, where he leaned against the counter, running Bracy's belt back and forwards through his hands. Directly he put the belt away and stood up and stretched and

yawned his widest. "I don't reckon it's scarcely worth the slavery," he said "besides which, yon side Wild Cat's across State Line."

And already the mill whistle blew dinner-time, and they all yet cootering around the store, a livelong morning being run to seed in talk, which was an unheard of thing whatever.

CHAPTER XXVIII

On a day before dawn Wait-Still-on-the-Lord Lowe took Venger and climbed to Bone Cave Rock and looked at the crowded sky of stars. And he said: "I wonder me, had I the run of all the worlds would I rest content, or still be craving what lay beyond?" And he laid him down upon the rock to wait for day, and all was so still he could hear the earth turning. With the fading of the stars birds were tuning up, and chipmunks stirring, and all the leaves and twigs were making the little noises that leaves and twigs make when they wake up in the morning. And when the fire-red sun came up, the mist streaked out and then rolled up in round bundles out of the hollows, and the smell of the earth was good. And Waits stood up and looked upon his home-place, and said: "Being a man is bound to dwell in one corner of the earth, this is most surely the likeliest. Even had I the run of the stars I'd come full circle to this place where I started. Preachers all time talk about a better world—but, great forever! what better world could a person crave but this! Truly my home-place is a desirous place to be in!"

And he came down from the rock and took his early way by a favoring path to Howards' Place, for it was a holiday, when old matters were to be set forever aside, and Allardene Howard was to be pledged to

Wait-Still-on-the-Lord Lowe. And he and Venger went lilting:

"O, don't you remember the Rocky Mountain Top
Where we sat side by side?
O, then you promised to wed with me
And be no other one's bride?
O, then you promised to wed with me,
And—be—no—other—one's—bride!"

It was not what a person could call a spring day, this being November, but Waits was in no manner cured of the eagerness in his heels. All the bright colors of fall were gone, but the brown and purple spread out upon the far hills was a sight fitten to make the blind see; and the few left leaves looked made of brass and copper; and bare trees stuck up here and yonder like a surprise to themselves; it was a fair blue day overhead and pleasant underfoot.

And such was his haste to be at Allardene's home that Waits got there in a manner before himself, and came upon a house where was a great stirring, for all were redding for the day.

And when he came to the place he stood against the gate, and leaned his head on Venger and played the tune of the Waking of the Earth, as had been shown him on Bone Cave Rock, and it drew Dena from out the house and she came down the path to him. The fresh morning air blew her hair about, and twittered the edge of her skirt against her knees, and Waits said: "You look made out o' clean air—all thinly light 'n' happy. A man craves to breathe you."

"Never you do so, Waits Lowe, or how'd we be pledged this noon-time?" She laughed; and her love drowned his restlessness and peace came to his eager eyes, though his faun's ear yet quested and threatened that not always would he stay so mild. But Allardene laughed again, for her own heart was wayward as a bird, and it was a better thing to capture his wildness than to have it dead before her.

So their eyes were strange as each looked into the other's heart, with a spice of that fear that sharpens true content. His eyes were wide and wondering, and hers deepened under her gathered brows; and together they went up the crisp path to Homer's eager call.

Now Bess in a torn apron and looking yet uncombed, darted from back of the house, around the sugar maple and out to the front yard, chasing the dinner chicken that fled unwilling before her. "Hi-yar! Waits," she called as she flashed by, "who was it bid you to breakfast?"

In the house Homer was sitting up straight in his chair and already had on his best black coat in place of the quilt, and his hair newly cut and smoothed.

"Trumlic you look, and gay!" Waits greeted him.

"I'm peart, I thank you," Homer said; but he nearly fell forward in the fire when Dena put on a sad face before him and said: "Waits has got him another love." And he could not make out what was, till Waits held Venger up before him.

"Mist' Howard," he said, "this here is Venger." And Homer looked at the fiddle and nodded friendly: "How d'ye!" he said.

And Waits went on: "Venger's a *he*. Don't you pay heed to Dena's foolishment." And they laughed so loud that Bess came in with the caught chicken in her arms and laughed too.

Homer had a mort of things to say about the late happenings, so he and Waits and Venger rested by the roasting fire, while the girls went on with righting the house for dinner company.

Dena's feet were eager and her eyes singing praises as she went about from one task to the next. And with his eyes on Dena, and his ears on Homer's talk, Waits was well-nigh distract' till Bess took pity on him and swept him forth from the way of her broom to settle on the front porch. Soon Dena brought the potatoes to get ready, and sat her down on the steps by him.

"Hit contents me, you not being different," she said. "I had fear the outland sights 'n' ways might give you a weariness of home-places."

"Been too many years the Lowes ain't changed their fur nor shed a feather. Being life ain't suited with us it can leave us be. Our tribe's too set to change this way 'n' that."

"You owned to craving a power o' new words when you set out in such a swivvet."

"Got me Venger in their place," he answered her. "Books ain't a thing but words crowded together, same as a city is folks crowded together—neither is healthy. Furthermore, Venger'll say what I bid him, and the books is no more than some other man's used thought. I don't aim to use after any man."

Dena pared two whole potatoes before she asked

him: "Which spells, having Venger, you're content once and for always?"

When time had gone by, Waits said: "I've been beyond 'n' back; and I've seen a power of strange things, yet I don't seem one mite nearer being easy in mind. I keep studying—and it's not in the sky, nor in flowing waters, nor sun nor moon; and it's come over me, maybe it's in you. I'd find rest 'n' peace with you. There's a light in your eyes promises I would."

And Dena answered him: "Let be, man. Happen ever you should come courting a girl for love, you'll be thinking about *her*. Never do you think of a thing saving how your ownself's going to make out. First one thing won't do you, then n'er thing won't do you, 'n' when all's said and you're yet not eased . . . maybe *I'll* do."

Waits was brought to a sudden stand. "God knows I was set on wedding with you, through it all. Why, Dena, I'd liefer hear you talk than hear music play. You're better to me than water running over rocks in spring. I was bound to come full circle with you all time in head."

Dena's eyes rested on him patiently.

"Words is pretty things," she said. "But they don't matter one way or the other in the middle of the bigness of life. Think about the days stretching long ahead—proud harsh days that can curse and gentle ones to bless. I crave to know fairly all that lies betwixt us."

"Why-all so serious-solemn?" Waits laughed at her.

"I've a bitter word to ask you."

"You can't speak a bitter word, Dena," he told her quickly, "such a word couldn't get outen lips like yours; it'd be shamed to pass 'em."

"But to wed unknowen—and find, too late, a fearful thing! Hit'd be like when you stand in the cold night at the back end of the year, watching the ghosts of all the things the frost has killed fly past on the lonesome wind."

"What fearful thing, Dena?"

"Burl Bracy."

"The Lord have mercy on him 'n' me both."

Dena jumped to her feet. "Tell me did you do it, Waits Lowe!"

"He's dead." Waits stood over against her, troubled over this thing he could not yet comfort his own thoughts about.

"You killed him?" Her face had gone ghostly white and her eyes were deep and woeful.

"Happen you'd wed with me—even so?"

Her look quenched his idle question, while her truthful hands said—Yes. "Tell me," she ordered, "and tell me true, Waits Lowe, efn I'm to be pledged to a murdering man."

Waits turned from her and looked out over Big Wolf Bald, gleaming golden-brown in the sunlight with its ledges of rock showing streaks of silver. "Not anyways meaning to," he said. "He ran himself over the edge of Wild Cat. Hit gramys me how he come to be that careless."

"But you ran him to it—with purpose all the while

to kill? Gin you had death in your heart, it was you murdered him." She came and stood by him that this thing might be faced out together.

Waits wrinkled up his forehead, and rubbed the back of his head where it was yet sore to the touch. Then he put a thankful arm around her.

"Judgmatically," he said slowly, "he left me for dead, or bad hurt, and took out in case he'd done beyond what was wholesome. All is, I got up with my head whirling, and kept after him, aiming undoubtedly to so spoil him he'd be scarce of Glen Hazard evermore; but I'd not be-nasty my hands to kill such."

"You not so much as *thought* to kill him?"

" 'Deed not!" he told her. "Besides which, it never was that serious."

And Dena, well knowen Waits no liar, was content, and no more was said twixt them of this thing then nor thereafter.

And Waits went back in house to make more talk with Homer, while the girls went on with their spasm of dinner fixments.

And there now came Virgil Howard, and Rashe and Barsha Lowe, and the Bart Brothers, and Fayre Jones and Sam Ewart with Aunt Matt—all dressed like Sunday and bearing pledge gifts.

All being ready they ate heartily of a merry dinner; and there was much talk; and when the women had set aside the food and dishes, all came into the forward room again, where Virgil Howard pledged the sure troth of Wait-Still-on-the-Lord Lowe to Allardene

Howard, and gave out that he suspected himself of going to wed them the first day of spring next following, and bid all present to witness; and the old women kissed Dena, and wished her joy and many children.

Soon thereafter the guests took their homeward way, and Waits and Dena stayed upon the porch of the house fere together. And Venger lay neglectful by them.

But in the year's lateness days grow short, and soon there was no heat in the westering sun and they went into the forward room, whence Bess had dragged Homer for a game of checkers on the kitchen table. And when Dena sat in the chair near the fire, and Waitstill lay stretched at her feet and Venger on the floor beside, they rested silent.

Till Dena said: "How deep do you love me, Waits Lowe?"

"How deep do I love you, Dena Howard?" Waits puzzled. "Don't know as ever I studied it out. Seems it's just part o' me."

And directly he went on: "Happen a person loves just a little, the least thing gets him strange; and efn he loves deep he hates deep; but happen he loves so deep it perfectly uses up all his heart, hate can't have place—and there's not a thing on earth can harm such love nor make it sorry. That's how deep I love you, Allardene Howard."

And, being content, Dena played with his words, and said, surprised: "Seems you're in love with me, Waits Lowe!"

"In love with you? I don't know all that love means

—but I feel for you as the dew for the grass, and the blue wood smoke for the still air at night-time."

"So's the air keeps still," Dena said, *"the smoke don't go kurling off over the far hills."*

"I'll have yearnings all my days 'n' years, and desires not to be quenched," Waits owned; "but I've come full circle, and hereafter my shoes are no more swift for roaming; my head, maybe—but there's Venger."

Dena picked up the fiddle like he might bite, and studied him lying in her lap, and she looked from Venger to Waits and back, and plucked a string. "No manner o' use being feared of it," she told herself—" 'tain't but a fiddle-box." Then she gave it into Waits's hand.

"Take him," she said; "let him talk, efn he's so minded. I guess the three of us'll get along."

Waits sat up cross-legged in front of the big fire, and stroked Venger into quiet old tunes, while Dena watched them in the firelight, and said:

"Wise folks will pity me for marrying a man with wild, restless eyes like yours. You look too much like the hills theirself to be safe. You're brown as the forest fire-scald; and all you'll do for years to come is inherit the sun and tramp the walkable ways 'n' be glad. Such a man to wed! But, some way, I'll risk you, even so, because I'm minded maybe the children will take after you."

Waits's hand dragged the stick slowly to its end and Venger chuckled.

And when they had all said more than it is of any

use to remember, Waits took his homeward way through the sharp moonlight, letting Venger have his head.

And the hills heard and the mountains knew and were filled with the sound of gladness, while heartsome and far the chant of Venger lingered through the still forest brooding over Glen Hazard.

THE END

GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY

AGLEY–askew, awry.
ANSUND–whole, sound, unhurt.

BEARM–emotion, excitement, stir.
BILL' STUFF–mill-cut as distinguished from hewn timber taken from your own land; hence billed or chargeable lumber.
BLINKY–slightly sour, as milk turned in a thunderstorm; curdled.
BLOCKADE–illicit liquor; from the smuggling term "to run the blockade."
BLUE STAR OF SPRING–Vega.
BOBBLE–clumsy mistake; to make a mess of a job; to fumble it.
BODACIOUSLY–altogether, out-and-out.
BOOMER–large gray squirrel.

CHERT–flinty road surfacing, pebbly dirt used commonly on second-class roads. (Originally Kentish dialect; cf. Celtic *ceart,* a pebble; Welsh *cæreg,* a rock; Gaelic *carr;* Irish *carrach.*)
COSSET–pet, cuddle, fondle; to "much."
CÛD–friendly, kind, affable.
CUMFLUTTERED–all put about by excitement.

DANDER–dawdle along; be on one's way.
DAUNCY–sick, sickly, ailing.
DEVIL'S-PAINT-BRUSH–the orange hawkweed; of the chicory family (*Hieracium aurantiacum*).
DEVYSE–explain, make clear (to others).
DORTS–sulks.
DOWIE–doleful, sad.
DOWNGO–declining in health or looks.
DRUMLY–darkly shadowed.

EDZACT–study out, figure (to oneself).
EVEGLÔM–evening twilight.
EYEBRIGHT–a mountain flower known also as bluet or "Innocence"; of the madder family (*Houstonia cærulia*).
ENVIOUS–jealous.

FELLOWLY–companionable, understanding.

FERE–sympathetic, kindly.
FRAY–see end of Glossary.

GAR–to compel, force, make.
GEY–very.
GLÔM–twilight.
GOLDTORHT–shining like gold, glistering.
GORM–mess, muck, dirt.
GRAMY–to vex.

HANTLE–a small crowd (perhaps from "handful").
HARDNESS–see end of Glossary.
HOUMS–mudflats, or swampy places that dry in summer.
THE HUNTER–Orion.

JOB'S COFFIN–The Dolphin.
JOWER–see end of Glossary.
JOY O' THE MOUNTAIN–trailing arbutus.

KURLING–hasting, walking rapidly or running; i. e., getting along with all speed.

LILTING–singing.
LINKSTER–interpreter, letter-reader for the illiterate (languager).
LOSEL–good-for-nothing, ne'er-do-well.
THE LOST ELL 'N' YARD–Orion's sword and belt.
LOWN–mild, balmy, soft to the touch.

MASTER (adverb)–very much, exceedingly; i. e., in masterly style.
MELL–same as modern "to mill"; used in the mountains as in *King Arthur and His Knights*—"and they melled stoutly together."
MOLDWARP–a slack-twisted, worthless man; a downgone wastrel.
MORNGLÔM–the morning twilight, an hour before full dawn.
MORT–a great deal.
MUCH (verb)–to make much of.

NIRLY–good-humored, but rough-spoken.

ONDING–pelting rain; as distinct from "smirr"—which see.
OVERBRAEDEN–spread over, overshadow.
OVERPEER–an overhung rock from which one would make a sheer drop.

PALAMITY–talky-talk; much words over little matter; highfalutin'ness.
PIGGIN–wooden water bucket.

REDD–set to rights; as "Redd up the house for comp'ny."
RINKIE FODDER–the Virginia Reel.
RIPPIT–see end of Glossary.
ROUND BRIGHT STAR–Arcturus.
RUCTION–see end of Glossary.

'SEVEN SISTERS–Pleiades.
SHUMMICKING–shifting to and fro uneasily; idling along.
SIB–kin to; "one of us."
SLICKENSLIDE–large, sloping rock on a mountain ledge; a rock that would coast a person down, as distinct from an "overpeer,"—which see.
SMIRR–Scotch mist, fine misty rain; cf. "onding."
SNUD–a hurry, a rush; same as "swivvet" but without the worry.
SPUDDING AROUND– ambling about, loitering here and there.
SURVIGROUS–great, excessive; term of superlative degree.
SWARVED–crowded up, huddled together.
SWIVVET–an anxious rush, haste with anxiety.

TINSEY–tiny, little.
TREDDAN–think over, reflect upon, study out.
TRIVVET–wild one, fly-about; nearest modern equivalent is "flapper."
TRUMLIC–vigorous, active, cheerful.
TWINKLES–pine or spruce needles; balsam leaves.

UPSCUDDLE–see end of Glossary.

WEDE–withered, shriveled up.
WIGGIN–mountain ash.

DEGREES OF FEELING AMONG UNFRIENDLY NEIGHBORS

A HARDNESS–ill-will.
A RUCTION–quarrel.
A RIPPIT–fight with fists.
A JOWER–real anger.
UPSCUDDLE–quarrel with bitterness.
A FRAY–fatal fight and shooting.